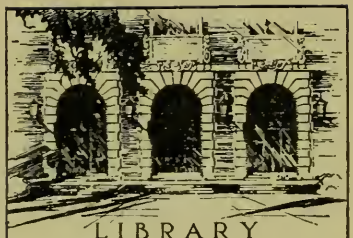

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A WILL AND A WAY.

BY

THE HON. HENRY COKE,

AUTHOR OF

"HIGH AND LOW."
"A RIDE OVER THE ROCKY MOUNTAINS,"
&c., &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
SUCCESSORS TO HENRY COLBURN,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.
1858.

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LONDON:
R. BORN, PRINTER, GLOUCESTER STREET, PARK STREET,
CAMDEN TOWN.

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A WILL AND A WAY.

CHAPTER I.

MONTEZUMA had his fish for dinner fresh out of the sea every day. The journey between the city of Mexico and the coast—the same which Montezuma's footmen traversed three centuries and a-half ago—is now with difficulty performed in fifty hours by a Spanish *diligencia*. This can hardly be called progression in any sense. Yet is it pretty much the rate at which Spanish matters generally speed, for, above whatsoever soil her imperial standard waves, its influence is felt like the shade of the deadly upas.

Continental diligences are lumbering enough,

as we all know; but if a man be rich he can travel in the *coupé;* if romantic or poor—the states are allied—in the *banquette;* and still, should he belong to neither of these great families into which Sancho's mother divided the whole human race—viz., *el tener* and *el no tener*—a choice is left of the *rotonde*, or the *intèrieur*. But your Spanish diligence—I speak of those which roll between the coast and the Mexican capital—is all *intèrieur*—the most corpulent piece of goods you ever set eyes on. The places, nine in number, are ranged in three rows—the middlemost being between the doors and windows. The roof of the carriage is low. The seats are inhumanly hard, and the springs positively nominal. For the most part this conveyance is crammed full. Half the journey lies through the *tierra caliente*, and those who perform it are in the habit of smoking incessantly night and day.

With this brief advertisement, I will now

invite thee, good reader, freely to lend me thy imagination, that I may the better direct it to a perfect conception of such circumstances and characters as it is the purpose of this opening chapter to represent. Not that I would have thee less relying as the story advances; for, should the Muse of Romance herself, inspired with the wit of a Cervantes, the comprehensiveness of a Shakespeare, the satire of a Fielding, the humour of a Sterne, the sublimity of a Dante, the grossness of a Rabelais, or the tragic powers of a Puff, compose a novel for thy special entertainment,—without the aid of thy fancy, she might rend her petticoats to shreds, yet would her inspirations or her chagrin alike be cast away.

Prithee, then, abandon every other conceit, and suffer, for the nonce, one of these Mexican diligences to carry thy imagination for a short distance along with its heavier cargo.

Twenty-four hours, so we will suppose,

have already been spent upon the road. The country gradually begins to grow less rugged and sterile. The bleak pine forests, which circumscribe the mountainous regions of the capital, yield to the more fertile lands of the *tierra templada*, and, not many leagues ahead, though considerably below in point of elevation, extends in glorious richness the glowing surface of a tropic soil. Our coach has yet some six or seven miles to make ere it reaches Perote, the little town where it halts for a single night. Our nine travellers are tired, bruised, smoke-dried, dirty, and, with two or three exceptions, in a peevish humour. One of these exceptions is the first to claim our attention. His position is the most uncomfortable in the carriage. On his right sits a fat Puebla merchant, on his left, a raw-boned, yellow-faced Mexican *militar*. At every jolt, and not five minutes elapse but with irritating shock the diligence is flung from one side of the road to the other, the whole weight of

the merchant forces the middle passenger's ribs on to the protruding angles of the soldier. Throughout the past night the bulky trader reposed his sleepy carcase upon his suffering neighbour, and each attempt made by the sufferer to lean away was answered by a defensive movement from the *militar*, whose temper, by nature crabbed, kept him wide awake with spleen, which every concussion served to aggravate.

Despite these annoyances, our foreigner, for such he plainly was, bore the pleasantest expression of any man in the coach. His features seemed incapable of assuming an unamiable cast; yet, with their softness and fine regularity there was no lack of manliness or animation. His figure, notwithstanding its cramped attitude, was obviously both tall and symmetrical. In complexion he was fair. His dress a complete suit of tweed. Between his legs he nursed a double-barrelled rifle, in his belt a revolver; and, let him travel from Paris

to Pekin, his country would hardly be mistaken, since in manner, in looks, and at heart, he was a thorough Englishman.

In the farthest corner of the diligence sat the companion of this young gentleman, one about fifteen years his senior, and in many respects a striking contrast to the youth. Deferring the description of this person to a fitter season, we will permit the other passengers to introduce themselves.

"Acqui Senores!" shouted the driver from the outside, as he flogged his mules round a sudden turn in the road, "*Acqui hay muy mal punto!*" ("Here is a bad place.")

"Would to heaven they (the robbers) might come and steal the gun!" muttered a discontented traveller from the centre row.

"I beg your pardon, Sir," said the young Englishman; "is the rifle still in your way?"

"The gentleman does not admire fire-arms," explained another, less incommoded by the offensive weapon;" "he is *muy pacifico*."

"I wish they'd face us," chimed in the *militar*, as he timidly stretched his gaunt neck out of the coach window. "We are all ready for 'em," he added, looking at the priming of an old flint-and-steel pistol.

"*El senor Capitan* is a man of great valour," whispered an admiring voice from the back seat.

"I'll back this pistol," cried the Capitan, casting a contemptuous glance at the rifle, "against any weapon in the carriage when the robbers do show themselves."

"Doubtless, Sir," observed the young Englishman's serious companion, "you have tested its merits before now."

"*Vaya!*" ejaculated the captain, which, literally rendered, was to say, "Get along with you."

"Weapons are well enough in the hands of soldiers," cries the fat merchant, "but passengers should not be permitted to carry a stand

of arms in a stage-coach. That's what I think about it."

"You don't mean that you'd submit to be robbed first, and then have your nose rubbed in the mud, would you, Sir?" exclaimed the proprietor of the rifle, smiling in his sleeve at the various insinuations thrown out to annoy him.

"Without doubt, Sir; where is the good of resisting? They will certainly riddle us with bullets if we do; whereas a few paltry dollars would satisfy their rapacity in a moment."

"If you expect me," said the young man, "to contribute to the support of these gentlemen of the road, because there happens to be a prejudice against fire-arms, I fear, Sir, you will be vastly disappointed."

"The English gentleman," murmured one, "surely does not mean to fire?"

"Not unless the robbers come," replied the grave man in the corner.

"What a game it would be," said the

youth in his native tongue to the last speaker, "if these everlasting robbers should turn up!"

"*Que dice?* What does he say?" eagerly inquired two or three Mexicans at once, leaning forward to catch an explanation.

"He says," gravely returned the interpreter, "that if the carriage be attacked he shall shoot those first whom he suspects to be in league with the *ladrones*. But," added he, "I will endeavour to dissuade him from the intention, though he is a desperate character for all his mild exterior."

"*Que demonio!*" exclaimed the audience in a breath; "may the Virgin bring us safe to Perote!"

In course of time Perote appeared at hand. When he saw it, "Ah!" sighed the *militar*, putting up his pistol, "there'll be no work for my old comrade to-night. *Caramba!* I'd have given ten ounzes (doubloons) for a crack at the thieves, I would!"

"What a devil!" exclaimed his admirers.

And so they reached Perote; and, rolling, rattling, rumbling through its narrow streets, the unwieldy vehicle safely landed its cargo at "La Fonda de las Diligencias."

Fortunately, disappointment is only the offspring of immoderate expectation; for, where no expectations have been raised, no disappointment can succeed. Now, not one of the nine passengers had anticipated anything in the way of comfort different from what they had found in Perote the last time they passed through it. Certainly distance does lend enchantment to every scene; and ever-springing hope marks its course with a somewhat brighter verdure than common. But our travellers were already acquainted with these pretty truisms—so that, when they found Perote as filthy as ever, not a word was said on the matter.

The Fonda de las Diligencias professed to afford accommodation for man and beast, and this profession it honestly fulfilled; but which

of the two fared better than the other it would be difficult to determine. This circumstance, however, did not arise from any leaning on the landlord's part to that system which many philosophers advocate, and which is known as the "ourang-outang theory." He did not class biped and quadruped in one common family from any physiological bias. He simply found it convenient to bestow as little care as possible upon his customers, and as this practically amounted to nothing at all, men and mules came to fare very much alike.

The construction of the building itself was remarkable. The entire ground-floor was exclusively devoted to animals, save and except one important corner of it—the kitchen. Above the basement were, or rather are—I describe the thing as it stands—two capacious chambers, one of them filled with beds like a hospital ward, the other serving as *La Comeda*, or eating room; to this apartment seven of the passengers hurried immediately

on their arrival. The two Englishmen, to the astonishment of the rest, did not join the dinner party until they had bathed, and were thoroughly refreshed by a complete change of dress. By this time the return diligence, on its way from the coast, had come in, and the whole of its cargo were seated at the repast with the others, making up together about fifteen persons. The recent American war formed the topic of general conversation, and here, as in the diligence, our friend the *militar* was the hero of imaginary battles. But when acts of bravery got to be the favourite theme, it was surprising to discover how many of that company had performed feats which Achilles himself would have trembled to think on. In truth, as they warmed at the thoughts of their own heroism, it seemed that each man there, the Englishmen excepted, who listened and smoked with phlegmatic silence, was panting for an opportunity to display his courage, or confirm his boastings.

Now, "No man," says the immortal Yorick, "cares to have his virtues the sport of contingencies;" least of all when the contingency is fraught with danger or personal inconvenience. When, therefore, there were heard a sudden rush—a scuffle at the door, and repeated cries of "*matar lo! matar lo!*" "kill him!" "kill him!" bursting suddenly into the room—what wonder every man there should turn coward in a moment? Terrified they assuredly were; some jumped upon the table, others in the scramble upset forms and chairs, tumbling themselves one upon the other, head over heels upon the floor. A few, armed with knives, forks, and even spoons, huddled together in a corner. The *militar*, flourishing the drumstick of a fowl over his head, had perched himself on the shoulders of an unfortunate, who mistook his burden for the robber; and the fat Puebla merchant was vainly scrambling, in heat and terror, to reach a higher level, when a large wolf-dog, the cause of all the

disturbance, fixed his fangs in the fleshy limbs of the overweighted trader, and held him painfully fast from behind. The shrieks which now issued from this unhappy creature were enough to frighten the dog himself, and did very much increase the panic of the whole party. Still the hound kept its hold, until a lifting kick from the shooting-boot of the younger Englishman caused it to let go, and fly, with a spring, at its supposed enemy, his sedate companion.

This person, who had watched the scene with perfect composure, stood prepared for the fierce attack of the savage animal. As the dog sprung at his throat, the Englishman recoiled a single pace, then, with a tremendous blow of his fist, struck the animal above the chest. In an instant they closed again; but although the dog managed to tear the collar of the man's coat, the coolness of the latter enabled him to gain a temporary advantage. At that moment his young friend repeated

the application of his armed foot, with such effect, that the animal rolled on its side, and lay gasping as if in death.

Scarcely had the contest been thus decided, when a rough-looking stranger entered the Comeda, and, stepping up to the elder Englishman, asked him with a fierce oath, "What he meant by killing his dog?"

The one thus addressed surveyed the interrogator with a look of surprise, which gradually relaxed into an expression wherein contempt was mixed with pity. "Simply, my friend," he quietly replied, "to hinder your dog from killing me. I do not think he is dead. If, however, you wish him to be better treated, I recommend you to teach him gentler manners."

"They are good enough for such as you," growled the other, reluctant to leave the spot without venting his fierce nature in a quarrel.

"My friend," returned the Englishman,

calmly, though looking a little white with suppressed emotion, "you are not polite, but as good breeding is the fruit of education, and this in turn the result of circumstances, you are more to be pitied than blamed. There is the door!"

"*Perro!* dog!" yelled the other, "will you insult a Spaniard?" and the words were no sooner out of his mouth than a knife gleamed over the Englishman's shoulder.

Happily its murderous descent was stopped. His wary eye had warned him of his danger; and the wrist that guided the weapon fell harmless into a grasp that would have mastered a more powerful resistance.

While this scene went on—its performance lasted but a minute or so—the other travellers kept at safe distances from the combatants. When, however, they saw the ruffianly intruder disarmed, they unanimously raised the cry of "*A fuera!* Turn him out!" and rushed up in a body as if to carry their threat

into execution. The Englishman, seeing their intention, released his hold. But, instead of betaking himself to flight, the desperado turned upon the surrounding bevy with an air of defiance that at once put them all to the rout. Then, addressing his conqueror, "*Ciudado*," said he, "Have a care! The revenge of a Spaniard is more deadly than the boast of a Mexican." And whistling his dog, which crawled after him, he descended speedily to the *patio*, or coral.

"Who is this man?" inquired half a dozen voices in an undertone. "He must be one of the *caballeros del camino*, (gentlemen of the road,)" suggested one. "He is as unsafe as his dog," said another. "Yes! they are a sweet pair." "Certes! they should both be chained up." "To the branch of a tree." "*Caramba!* But the *cuchillo* (knife) was near letting daylight into the Englishman." "But *Que! hombre!* Didn't you see how fast the other held him? I'll warrant ye the

caballero doesn't forget that grip in a hurry." "He swore to remember it whether or no." "I would like to know who he is, though."

"Hist!" said the *militar*, with a mysterious sign, bespeaking caution. Then, after a timid look towards the door, "Don't you know who that is?"

"No! Who?" exclaimed all together.

"*Carajo!*" swore the *militar*, "that's the terriblest *ladrone* in the Republic. That's Vasquez!"

"Vasquez!" echoed the audience, turning pale at the mention of the dreaded name.

"Vasquez!" repeated the elder Englishman, his face suddenly lighting up with intense and even painful concern,

"The very same," returned the *militar;* "he who was an officer in the Spanish army, and is now the terror of every soldier—I mean of every traveller—in the country. But where is the Englishman gone? The man must be mad! As sure as he breathes, the

next time he falls in with Vasquez he'll find Satan himself at his back."

"Does anybody know more of this fellow than his service in the army?"

"*Vaya!*" cried the *militar*, "I can tell you all about him."

"Is there not some story of his murdering the daughter of an Englishman?"

"No, no! You have it wrong. Though, now I come to think on it, this Englishman might—yet that can't be—he is not old enough. Perhaps his companion can tell us. What! is he off, too? *Carajo! Que demonios son los Ingleses!*" "What devils those English are!"

"I am positive, however, I have heard some tale of the kind."

"If you will listen to me, Señores, I will give the authentic version," said the *militar*, pompously. "Some years past—"

"I beg pardon, Sir, but how many should

you think?" interrupted a nervous old gentleman, anxious to parade his interest.

"Oh, twenty or thirty, perhaps, I cannot say precisely. Well," resumed the *militar*, "about thirty years ago—"

"Then you think, Sir, it was nearer thirty than twenty years?" asked the old man.

"*Que! hombre!*" cried the *militar*, "how the d——l can I tell the story if you stop me in the middle of every sentence?"

"Dear me! I'm sure, gentlemen, I humbly apologize. I had not the smallest intention—"

"Well, well!" cried the others impatiently, and the *militar* set off again. "About twenty years ago—"

Here the old man got so nervous he was forced to step aside.

"An English gentleman," pursued the *militar*, "came to Mexico on his travels. He brought with him letters of introduction to the principal families of the city. Among the

houses he visited was that of Don Diego de Aquilar, a man of great wealth and "—

"Quite true, Sir, quite true; I remember Don Diego perfectly, Señores," interposed the fidgetty old traveller, "and I remember perfectly well, Señores, the circumstance which"—

"Señores," recommenced the *militar*, appealing to his audience, "if you think this gentleman can satisfy your curiosity better than I, then—"

"No, no! Señor Capitan, pray go on—this gentleman cannot be permitted to interrupt any more."

"For the last time, then," resumed the Capitan, "Don Diego had an only daughter. The Englishman fell in love with and married her. During the first years of his marriage he remained in this country; but his wife died, and he returned to England, with one or two children, I don't know which."

"Two," whipped in the old man.

"As it happens, I'm pretty sure there was but one," returned the *militar*.

"Two—two, I do assure you—a boy and a girl."

"I'd stake my commission, now, there was but one."

"Well! but my dear Sir, I know for a certainty."

"One," obstinately insisted the *militar*.

"Two," said the other, with like obstinacy.

"One."—"Two."—"One."—"Two."—

"Then have it so, and be —— to you," cried the captain in a towering passion, "or I shall not get through to-night. On the death of Don Diego, Señores, the Englishman became possessed of some of his estates, which again brought him to Mexico. This time his daughter, now about eighteen years of age, came with him. She was a miracle of beauty."

"Perfectly true, I saw her; 'tis perfectly true."

"Some law-suits (the other branches of the family contesting his claim) detained the Englishman so long that Vasquez, who was then a young officer on the staff, had time to fall desperately in love with the girl. He made her an offer of marriage—she refused him absolutely. He urged his suit for a whole year. The father at last interfered, and as the surest way to make him desist, informed him that the Señora's heart and hand were pledged to a countryman of her own. To most men this intelligence would have been conclusive. Not so with Vasquez. He ceased to persecute the Señora; but withdrew only to lay a plot for her destruction. Partly in disgust at the process of the law-suit, and partly for his child's sake, the Englishman left Mexico. He was scarcely fifty miles from the city when Vasquez, at the head of an armed band, met him on the road. The Señora was carried off, and no more was heard of her from that day forth."

"But Vasquez, what did he?"

"Took to the road. For, through the influence and money of the Englishman he lost his commission; and fearing, perhaps, the danger of hired vengeance, he ended by keeping to the new profession of which accident had made him a member; and, so successful has he been, that here you see him, to this day, setting all the authorities in the country at defiance."

CHAPTER II.

"Well, Fabian! What is it?" said the elder to the younger of the two Englishmen, as they met not far from the door of the Fonda.

"That's just what I meant to ask you," returned the other. "I thought that, in a fit of public spiritedness, you were going to shame the military, and turn thief-taker. I see you havn't caught the rascal. But do tell me how it happens that you and this Mr. Basket, or whatever they call him, are old friends?"

"Friends! Why, is there anything so extraordinary in my wishing to secure a fellow who wishes to cut my throat, when I learn this

man to be one who never was known to make an empty boast?"

"Ay, ay, I see. I couldn't make out what had got you. There's not much fear, however, of his troubling you again. I hope in less than a couple of days we shall be shivering our timbers abaft the British binnacle."

"I fear not," said the other. "I always had it partly in my intention to make a circuit, on horseback, between this and Jalapa; on thinking the matter over, I have decided to do so. I am sorry we must part, since the passage home is pleasanter with a companion than without one."

"For which reason I'd sooner wait till you are ready to make it with me."

"What! would you stay for the next steamer, then?"

"Gladly, if you're not tired of me, that is."

"I tired of you! Had I supposed my invitation would have prolonged your stay, I should not have pressed it so tardily. Come

with me by all means. The country through which we have to pass is the loveliest you can behold. To-morrow we will hire horses, and make a start."

"Bravo! I'd ten to one rather be dangling my long legs across the ribs of a hack, than have 'em tied in a knot in one of those pot-bellied shake-ye-to-bits. As for the scenery, you've no notion how sentimental it makes me."

The following day, according to agreement, Raven—that was the name of the elder traveller—and his young friend Fabian were riding side by side on a pair of lean, though serviceable galloways. Their road, by frequent turnings along the face of a lofty ridge of mountains, raised them from terrace to terrace, in gradual ascent, above a plain whose further boundary was laved by the waters of the great Atlantic. At each bend in their narrow and stony path the higher altitude added fresh beauties to the magnificent scene. So clear was the atmosphere that it seemed to assist

rather than impede the sight. The fiercest rays of the tropical sun had already passed into another longitude, and the eternal snows on Orizaba's Peak reflected a blaze still brilliant, but deliciously cool. A gentle breeze setting inland from the ocean began to wave the crowded forests that grew more dense and luxuriant as they neared the level of the sea. There is hardly a plant on the face of the globe which this teeming soil will not produce; and rich was the fragrance of the loaded gale as it swept upwards, freighted with odors from the pitanga, the paulinia, and the blossom or the grumijana. Orange groves were always close at hand, and a thousand parasitic plants, amongst which the vanilla was easiest to distinguish, oppressed the senses with their balsamic scents. Here and there, in the vicinity of a few scattered huts, patches of cultivated land relieved the over-teeming earth, and the light green of the banana, the unripe maize, the rice, the sugar-cane, and the

smaller plants of cacomito, jalap, &c., formed delightful contrasts with the sombre tints of the grand primeval woods. As the travellers advanced, flocks of paroquets skimmed over their heads. Glittering humming-birds poised themselves in mid-air, twittering in their honey feast, at the mouth of some sweet flower. Mackaws, cockatoos, and parrots made their screams echo from the hollow rocks above them, and the noisy *chachalaca*, or Mexican pheasant, crowed its challenge from the branch of many a tree.

For some time the younger Englishman was lost in silent rapture at the panorama, whose enchanting beauties he had never till now even dreamed of. Like other young men of the day his conversation relished strongly of the flippancy, or even slang tone in vogue with youths fresh from college. But beneath this surface were qualities worthy a more refined expression; and, as he himself had lightly intimated, scenes of grandeur or interest

never failed to awaken in him the sentiments of an excellent heart, and of a fine understanding. The influence of the present hour was, so to speak, soaking into his mind; like a new era in his world of thought, it was giving expanse to his whole sentient being. "What ecstacy"—these were his inward thoughts—"What ecstacy is there in such moments of contemplation! when the soul is borne aloft on the great rolling tide of some new influx of images and emotions; when, in the grandeur of external objects, it is helped to feel the sublimity of its own internal resources; when man is no longer man the animal, but man the spirit; not the isolated atom of an incongruous system, but an inseparable part of the All, the Oneness of the universe; not insignificant as without this, but significant as belonging to it—sublime in that necessity as the Whole itself is sublime! How all this beauty calls forth our love—the love of the Infinite typified here! Who can look upon

such glory, and not worship its mighty Cause with all his soul? Who can wonder that Nature was the god of heathens? who marvel at the Eastern's mysticism—his craving for immersion into the divine essence; or who forbear with the Stagyrite's fancied elves to cry, "There *are* gods and such things *must* be the work of their hands!"

"What an Eden it is, Raven!" he said, aloud; "I would not have missed this on any account."

"Yet," said the other, rousing himself from very different thoughts, "the world is full of scenes not less beautiful than this before us; and all this beauty is lost, unless some accidental wanderer receives the transient image of it on the perishable mirror of an eye that wipes it out with a single wink."

"Lost! What is lost? Is then all beauty created for a being so rarely capable of recognizing even its most glaring forms? Are then for man the glories of those distant worlds,

whose light, travelling millions of miles in a moment, has not yet reached his earthly habitation? Even in this world of ours, nature's choicest charms, if revealed, are allotted to savage races. The countries inhabited by civilized man are comparatively poor in physical beauties. Here the soil alone possesses energy, there the being. Beauty," exclaimed the speaker, with a touch of sadness, "exists not for man."

"Still its influence upon his nature is so potent, one cannot help feeling it must be intended, here at least, for the high purposes of his ennoblement."

"Has it that effect?" asked the elder reasoner. "Take Europe as the test. Countries marked by physical beauty have not produced the most exalted spirits. The nation which numbers most thinkers is peculiarly devoid of romantic feature."

"Germany?"

"Yes."

"But surely Greece and Rome have had their poets and philosophers, whose excellencies may compare with those of later times."

"And you pretend these owed their inspirations to Grecian mountains and Italian skies? Forgetting that Plato divined his systems between the mud-banks of the Nile, that Ovid sang from the hated swamps of Measia, that Homer was blind, and that genius in every age, in every land, has shone perhaps most dazzlingly from the obscurity of dungeons, or from the dingy abodes of bustling cities. Think you these miserable Mexicans are ennobled by scenes like this we contemplate? No! Parnassus makes not the poet. Beauty is ideal. We confound our impressions with the objects which awaken them."

"It may be so," said Fabian, "yet it is hard to suppose any mind can contemplate Nature in such magnificence as we behold her here, without being the better for it. The

very air of these mountains is enjoyment to me."

"Pure oxygen usually is to most people," said Raven, smiling. "However, I comprehend your meaning; communion with Nature imbues the soul with a sense of pervading harmony, and of this we partake. Be the details never so startling, in combination they form a complete idea. Motion, and hence life, are laws, their cause a necessary consequence."—

"See!" exclaimed the last speaker, breaking silence, "there, at the head of that valley, is the end of our day's journey; I shall not be sorry to get my supper."

Some eight or ten small houses, at good distances apart, composed the little Indian village where our travellers intended to halt for the night. As they rode in Raven selected the largest of the huts, and alighting from his saddle with a "*Dios guard' ustedes*" requested provend for the horses and themselves. The

demand was readily attended to. Some sheaves of Indian corn, spread on the roof of the shed, were soon cast before the hungry animals. And while a comely maiden prepared *tortillas* at the threshold, her mother dislodged an old hen from a dark corner in the cabin, whose obstreperous cackling, once silenced, was ere long succeeded by a bubbling sound from a savory broth. Notwithstanding the prompitude with which the above arrangement was effected a tough old fowl is not made soup of in a minute. During the process of stewing and simmering Fabian and Raven lay swinging in a couple of grass hammocks which they had stretched from the posts that supported the maize-thatched verandah; the younger man spent the time in thinking what an admirable invention a grass hammock was, and how charmingly adapted to the sultry climate in which he found himself. He also calculated that the interior of a Mexican hut would, on the average, cost him about five flea bites for

every minute he stayed there; then, turning to look at the *tortillas*, wondered whether the "jumping cattle" found the plump and glossy little Indian tenderer and sweeter than any other member of the family. Having got upon this train, his fancy soon lost itself in a labyrinth of curious speculations, which were suddenly interrupted by the arrival of half a dozen men and youths, who came to say that a scorpion had just stung a boy in the foot, and if the strangers had any medicine they were entreated to administer it. The two friends instantly set off to the place where the child lay. On coming to the house they found the poor little sufferer stretched upon the floor, screaming and writhing with an acuteness of pain which threatened to destroy life itself. It appeared that he had set his shoeless foot upon the poisonous reptile, and the sting had pierced the tender flesh between the toes. This occurrence, not by any means uncommon, excited no extraordinary sympathy in the by-

standers. A little sister of the boy seemed the only one seriously alarmed. Directly Raven entered, the child commenced explaining to him, with hopeless garrulousness, every particular which had preceded the accident; she bitterly denounced the whole creation of venemous insects, and with vindictive triumph fetched the identical one which had fruitlessly attempted to protect its own life by endangering that of an unconscious destroyer.

The great evil to be apprehended in the boy's case was fever. Luckily Raven carried with him a few of what may be called the sledge-hammers of medicine; such as calomel, opium, quinine, &c. Being a veteran traveller too, accident had often called his medical knowledge into requisition. A small share of this was adequate to the present emergency. The wounded foot was bathed in *aquá ardiente*, and "nature's nurse," speedily acknowledged the invitation of the soothing laudanum. To the simple-minded natives, totally ignorant of

the use of chemicals, this sudden relief from torture appeared little short of a miracle. In less than ten minutes every family in the hamlet was beleaguring Raven with applications for his nostrums or advice. He found himself obliged to attend to them; and whatever the disease, casual or chronical, he administered to it with the properest remedies he possessed; in the absence of these, there being no alternative, he physicked heavily, right and left, with blue pill. In this way nearly two hours were consumed, he all the while being kept from his dinner. At last he bethought him that Fabian might be waiting till he came back; a better pretext could not be wanted for desisting from his charitable labour. He returned to their hut, and impatiently ordered the soup to be set upon the table. Well seasoned with chillies and lentils, stewed to an excellent consistency, no dish had ever looked more tempting; the tortillas also were piping hot, and tender as the most delicious crumpets.

Fabian, however, was not quite ready, so his companion, who took great pleasure in his society, thought to wait a few moments, the better to enjoy the meal when the other came. Raven looked at the tortillas, and perceived they would soon be as tough as a cowhide; the savory steam of the soup ascended to his nostrils only to tantalize his disappointed palate.

"What the plague," thought he, "is that boy about, keeping dinner waiting here till it is quite spoiled." But now that he had waited full a quarter of an hour, it was not worth his while to make this trouble for the sake of another five minutes. "Besides," added he to himself, "nothing can be more foolish than to allow oneself to be put out by such a trifling inconvenience, and 'tis moreover a rare opportunity for the practice of a little patience." This reflection proved sufficiently pleasing to continue its good effects for about twice the length of time it had taken him to

make it. But as Fabian seemed as far off as ever, Mr. Raven endeavoured to beguile himself by beating what is called a devil's tatoo, first with his hands, then, for a change, with his feet. It did not take very long to exhaust the novelty and pleasure of this pastime; his watch was then pulled out and laid upon the table. "I'll give him exactly five minutes more. No, six—I'll give him six minutes. If he does not come then, I'll not wait another second." "Come," says Good Sense, "you had better set-to; the victuals will get worse and worse, and your friend will be vexed when he finds you have waited such a long time for him." "So he ought," cries Temper. "Is it becoming in a youth to be so inconsiderate? He might have guessed how long I would be away; it will serve him right to be annoyed." "Now that is sheer spleen," suggested Conscience. "Belly, belly!" cried Hunger. "The deuce take the fellow!" exclaimed Raven, jumping up, "unless he be looking after the horses,

it is really inexcusable." With these words he ran round to the back of the house, when what was his astonishment to behold Fabian no more thinking about the horses than about him, but as coolly and as pleasantly as might be making very pretty love to the plump little Indian maiden, who, to make matters worse, seemed no less entertained with the occupation than the youth himself. "Now this is abominable," exclaimed Raven, fully satisfied of the justness of his ire. "Fabian! Fabian, I say, do you intend to keep me waiting for dinner all night, while you sit playing the fool with that girl?"

"All right old fellow," answered the youth, quite unconscious how time had slipped away, "don't wait for me." So saying, he seized the opportunity of the damsel's confusion, and stealing a most unceremonious kiss, hastened off to join his companion.

"I hope you haven't been waiting long," were his first words.

"Only three quarters of an hour," said the other; "another time when you mean to keep me waiting for my dinner until you have satisfied your own refined taste, perhaps you will be good enough to give me notice."

"My dear fellow!" returned the accused, with a good-natured smile, "I hadn't a notion of this—I thought—"

"You thought! Did you think I was such an ass as to go without supper, because every idiot in the village expected me to cure him?"

Fabian looked sorry; but like a wise man made no reply.

"*Esta fria la sopa?* Is the soup cold?" unfortunately interposed the hostess, who saw something had gone wrong, but did not understand what.

"Cold!" muttered Raven, "I should think it was cold; and if you had not been a *bestia* (a fool) you would have set it on the fire to keep it hot till this young gentleman had

done making love to "—he checked himself, for even in anger he would not make mischief, so added—"to every woman in the place."

The matron would certainly have flown out at the term "*bestia;*" but remembering some compliments Fabian had paid to herself, she answered "*Que! Bestia!*" And there the matter dropped.

The meal ended, both travellers betook themselves to their hammocks. Fabian, whose sweet temper soon banished every disagreeable recollection of the quarrel, smoked his pipe in placid luxury beneath the star-crowded heaven. Raven, on the contrary, lay humiliating himself with self-accusations, determining, in his heart, to offend no more, and resolving to make ample apology for this transgression on the morrow. Other thoughts, of a more exciting nature, banished the desire of repose from his mind; when these came uppermost, he listened to the healthy snoring of his companion, till being fully satisfied

that he slept; he softly threw his *serape* over his shoulders, placed a pistol in his breast, and strode hurriedly through the village till he neared the last hut on its outskirts. Here he paused to catch the sound of several voices as they chaunted one of those wild airs, with guitar accompaniment, to which the natives of Mexico dance their favourite *fandango*. An expression of doubt and disappointment passed over his face, when he discovered sounds of revelry where he had expected silence. He did not long hesitate, however, but passing on, gained the entrance of the hut; a few of those families he had visited in the afternoon were present—the rest were unknown to him; his previous acquaintances recognised and invited him to join the noisy party. The courteous salutations practised by even the most deteriorated offsets of the proud old Castillian race were exchanged, and Raven seated himself on a table, at one end, where his quick

eye had already detected the owner of the hut, and the mistress of the ceremonies. Pulling out a packet of cigarillos he presented it to the woman by whose side he had placed himself; she scanned him closely before she accepted the proffered offering. "Is your worship English or American?" she suspiciously inquired.

"English, *para servir a usted*, at your ladyship's command!" was the reply.

"What's your name?"

"Eduardo. And your's, if I may ask the question?"

"Don Eduardo!" repeated the woman, again looking him over. "Mine is Juanita."

"Alvarez?" added Raven, stooping his head to whisper the second name in her ear.

"Dios!" exclaimed the woman, starting from her seat. "Who knows me by that name?"

Again Raven whispered.

The woman took his hand, and bent down to hide her face. "I will tell you," said she, "but his friends are about us—and I—but, will you swear that your purpose is friendly?"

"By heaven!" exclaimed Raven, solemnly, "I swear it!"

"Then listen."

He leant close to her to receive the communication. "Good!" said he. "God grant the mission may succeed."

"Alas! I fear the difficulties are insurmountable. Beware of the road; there may be danger before you reach Cordova. Now, mix with these people, or we shall be suspected."

"Your worship will tarry with us to look after your patients, we hope," said one of Raven's former acquaintances.

"My friend, I have business at Cordova, and must leave you to-morrow at daybreak."

"Business *where?*" asked a stranger, pushing between the speakers.

"At some distance from here," returned Raven, carelessly.

"The gentleman says he must be at Cordova to-morrow," rejoined another. "We want him to stay with us."

CHAPTER III.

To avoid the heat, which in these latitudes becomes intolerable in the middle of the day, the two Englishmen were on their horses with the first appearance of dawn. They were not the only early risers in the village. Ere they had left the last house behind them, their progress was arrested by the shouts of one running to overtake them; as he came up Raven observed that he was the last person who had accosted him on the previous evening. He looked anxious and alarmed, but was too much out of breath to speak for a minute or two.

"Señor," he presently cried, "*Por el amor de Dios.* For the love of God, do not travel this road."

"Wherefore not, friend?" said Raven, smiling at the man's terrified demeanour.

"Because—ah! Señor it was not my fault, how could I know to whom I was speaking? Didn't he ask me the question when you yourself were standing by? I would have given him the knife rather than have betrayed so benevolent a gentleman as your worship."

"What on earth is the fellow talking about!" cried Fabian, who began to think the man demented. "He, he, what he?"

"Oh sir, he is one of Vasquez's band; directly he heard you were on your way to Cordova, he left the village at once. Juanita told me to stop you, she thinks this man has dogged you from Perote; sure enough sir, the country between this and Cordova is the worst in the world for robbers. And since the soldiers hung Pablo they have been more desperate than ever."

"Bravo!" exclaimed Fabian, rubbing his hands with glee. "We shall see sport yet—

tut man! don't be afraid, I'm not going to make game of you." This he said, seeing the Mexican cowering at the sight of a large pistol which he pulled from his belt.

"Well!" said Raven, "we must take our chance. Thank Juanita;—good bye." And, putting spurs to his horse, he left the astonished messenger to pick up a handful of *quartos* which he scattered broadcast upon the road.

"Do you think," inquired the younger traveller, "these fellows will have the pluck to stop us?"

"Whether they will stop us," returned the other, his keen eye kindling with determination, "is one thing; whether they will try, is another."

"By George! I should like to have a bit of a scrimmage; how odd though, if we should happen to stumble across Vasquez again!"

"Stranger accidents might befall us," replied Raven, sententiously.

"I'd bet a trifle I hit him first pop with my revolver," said Fabian, taking aim at a *guana* perched on a rock that overhung their pathway. "Look there now! wasn't that a neat shoot, as the Yankees say? I've killed the beast as dead as mutton."

"Fye," said Raven; "what wanton thoughtlessness! why should you end the happy career of one of God's little creatures, to gratify the vanity of a true eye? To lose that eye would be a very serious affliction. Yet you put out all that little being's light, and overwhelm it with a mortal anguish for mere amusement."

"I'll never kill another as long as I breathe. Well! who'd have thought it was so natural to be a butcher?" and Fabian both looked and felt ashamed for what he had done.

"Now you've made me so serious," he presently recommenced, "at shooting a reptile, tell me, Raven, do you think one has a right to shoot a man?"

"Under what circumstances?"

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"Why, of course, I mean if he stops you on the highway, as, for instance, one of these fellows might stop us."

"It is a serious thing to take a man's life," mused Raven, partly to himself, "be the circumstances what they will."

"So it is;" said Fabian. "But then it is a mighty serious affair to get a crack on the skull one's self, and when it comes to be either one or the other, and you have the option—eh?"

Raven seemed lost in his own thoughts.

"The robber, you see," pursued the other, "engages in the fight with the clear understanding that either you or he is to bite the dust. It can't, therefore, be very surprising to him if he now and then gets a bullet through his own head."

Raven laughed a little, but said nothing. After riding a mile or two, he suddenly remembered his resolve to apologise for his last night's behaviour.

"Fabian," he began, "I should have made the *amende* to you for my abominable conduct yesterday, as soon as I had the sense to see my fault in its true colour."

"Hoot, Toot!" ejaculated the youth, "I had clean forgotten all about it."

"Not I, though; and when you have lived to make as many good resolutions as I have, you will not easily forget the humiliation which follows when one has unhappily been broken."

"My dear Raven," rejoined the other, "I'll be bound for it, I break fifty times more resolutions than you do. By George! you never saw *me* in a twig, did you? Wait a bit; it's something out of the common when it does come!"

"Indeed, it must be. Long might I wait to see your amiable disposition thrown off its balance; and on that very account there is less excuse for my being out of temper with you."

"Oh, never mind. Hilloa! —what's this? Phah! Here's Pablo, by all that's inodorous!"

These exclamations burst from the youth, as at the moment his sight was shocked by an apparition of a horrifying nature. From the lower branch of a large tree, at the wayside, swung the already decayed corpse of the robber — not suspended in hoops and chains, as is sometimes the case. The body was hanging by the fatal cord which had extinguished life. So elongated was the neck —the weight had separated the vertebræ and stretched the muscles—that as the traveller rode past, he might well feel afraid lest a breath of wind, or even the jarring of the road, should break down the loathsome remains upon him.

"That's an ugly sign for a road-side!" said Fabian, pressing by the hideous spectacle, with a shudder. "Bah! I don't see, though, why the public should be punished as well as the culprit!"

"It is an awful warning," said his companion. "Think you that it is either justifiable or expedient?"

"The question is a vexed and a vexing one. Some years ago I was a violent advocate for abolishing capital punishment. But in proportion to my then vehemence, I have lived to think those opinions wrong."

"You are for hanging now?"

"To hang a degraded wretch, whose conscience has become paralysed by a process of crime, for the expiation of his misdeeds, I hold to be neither justifiable nor expedient; it is simply an act of impotent revenge. But prove to me your right to hang at all, and I will not question the expediency of deterring others from like crimes by the terror of a like fate."

"Then you do think others are deterred by these dreadful warnings?"

"Most indubitably. The good may be influenced by the hope of reward. But the

bad—how can it be otherwise?—are only moved by the fear of punishment."

"Well, 'tis hard to say," returned Fabian, "whether one has the *right* to hang 'em or not. You know what old 'Coke upon Lyttleton' said of it?"

"No—what?"

"'We hang criminals between heaven and earth, because they're not good enough for the first, and are too bad for the other.'"

"There is more wit than wisdom in the remark, whoever made it," said Raven.

After this little discussion, the conversation grew desultory. Presently it was entirely put a stop to, by an accidental word which fell from the lips of the elder Englishman.

"Why not, Raven? I would as soon live here as elsewhere."

"My dear Fabian," was the answer, "you would be tired of the country in six months. Besides, what would the fair Belinda say?"

The colour glowed through the tanned features of the youth. "I neither know nor care," said he, and there the dialogue ended.

Having lain by to take their siesta at the hottest part of the day, they were again jogging along, when their respective cogitations were suddenly interrupted by the presence of a third person, whom they fell in with as they came to the mouth of another road which debouched into their own. Before, however, we speak of the stranger, let us take this occasion to consider the appearance of our friend, the elder traveller. Raven, the reader has already been informed, was about fifteen years older than his companion. If we call Fabian three or four and twenty, we may safely say Raven could not well be less than forty. This, in truth, was his age. With one sign and another he might have been taken for a few years older; yet his frame was too firm, too erect, too vigorous,

for a man whose knees begin to falter with the shaking of the down-hill step. In height, he was of middle stature; across the shoulders exceedingly broad. His head was large, at least it looked so, for his face was large. His hair—which was thick and slightly grizzled—he wore long. Like Fabian, he had a beard. But the most remarkable of his features were his eyes, shaded beneath a projecting brow, they still shone out brightly, piercingly, and watchfully. He had a prominent nose, yet straight. A slightly sensual look dwelt about the region of the mouth, although, from habit, his lips were constantly compressed. Every lineament betokened active thought and traces of care. To say this or that was the wonted expression of Raven's countenance, would lead astray. His features varied with the complexion of his mind, and of this they were a faithful index.

Now for the stranger. He rode on a mule. The mule and he were equally sleek. Each

was round and glossy with good stalling. The person of the rider was clad—swathed, we might almost say—in black camlet; for the coat he wore reached to his ancles. Black knee breeches, black silk stockings, and buckled shoes completed his apparel. The whole was roofed over with a hat, rolled up at the sides, but projecting a good half yard before and behind. Not satisfied with this, our stalwart priest (who can mistake the sacerdotal garb?) protected his head from the afternoon sun by a wide-spreading scarlet umbrella.

"God preserve your worships!" exclaimed this stalwart pillar of the church, touching his hat with much humility of manner.

"Is your reverence travelling to Cordova?" asked Raven.

"Even so," said the priest; "it is my home. You gentlemen seem to be strangers here?"

"We are, sir. Is it far to Cordova?"

"Our reckonings are made by time, rather

than by distance in these mountain paths. On such nags as yours, and at this pace, four or five hours should see us there."

"Talking of nags—that is a notable bit of mule's flesh you're on, sir," said Fabian, surveying the priest's animal with the eye of a connoisseur.

"It would take a good one to beat him on a long journey, sir," answered the rider.

"He does credit to his keep," said Raven.

"Nay, sir, he is like his master—holds his flesh despite the hard usages of the world, and thrives on a mere nothing—a little chopped straw, sir, scarce ought else."

"Ex nihilo nihil fit," said Fabian, half aloud. "If he calls the mule's fare chopped straw, perhaps he'll allow that it's master lives in clover."

A humorous smile passed over the priest's face, but it escaped the observance of both his companions.

"I should say," remarked he who last

spoke, "on such a mule as that, your reverence might show a bold back to robbers if they beset you."

"May the blessed Virgin shield us from such a catastrophe!" exclaimed the padre, devoutly crossing himself.

"We are informed this particular district is much infested by bandits," said Raven. "Do you frequently hear of them, sir?"

"Now and then," returned the other; not often, sir."

"I am told," pursued Raven, "there is a notorious robber called Vasquez in this part of the country; did your reverence ever see him? Hear of him, I presume every one must."

"See him!" exclaimed the priest, with a shudder. "God forbid it should ever be my misfortune! As to hearing of him, all who travel in these parts hear enough, and some more than enough of his dreaded name."

"Is it many years, sir, since you came to

reside in this country?" inquired Raven, with considerable interest in his manner.

"About five years, sir, not more."

Raven's face relaxed into its previous unconcern."

"It is unlucky," said Fabian, still harping upon the subject uppermost in his mind, "that the greatest rogue in all Mexico should happen to be a parishioner of yours, sir."

"It is the business of the Government to protect its subjects and their property," returned the priest, rather tartly.

"The disease is incurable by the time *that* doctor is called in," said Raven, taking up the word. "You, sir, who educate the people, should be the remover of these moral evils."

"Ah, sir," replied the divine, suddenly resuming his humble air; "What can such as I do? I am but a feeble pastor—an unworthy servant of the Holy Church. These brigands care for no one but the soldiers."

Then, as if undesirous of provoking an argument, which whatever might be its issue, would at least tend to make him still hotter than he was, the priest gathered up his reins, and, dismounting to tighten the girths of his saddle, dropped some little distance behind. Coming to a narrow bend in the road, which did not admit of two horsemen abreast, Fabian slackened the pace of his animal also, while Raven went to the front, and led the other two in single file down the steep and rugged pass. On the right of the travellers rose a wall of broken masses of rock, densely overgrown with ferns of every description, and, where there was sufficient earth, large forest trees or minor shrubs crowded in, so that not a foot of soil remained unproductive. On their left was a precipitous declivity, which, for six or seven hundred feet, was without a break. Then, again, came a ledge of rock, which gradually sloped away in jungle-covered inclines. The path itself—not more than a

few feet broad—had, from its steepness, been deeply furrowed by the late heavy rains, so now presented a surface resembling the old channel of a winter torrent. Every stone native to the place, and numbers more carried there by the flood, lay above-ground, obstructing the way.

Had it not been for the intense heat, which rendered them too lazy, our travellers would assuredly have got off their horses, and have led them until the road began to reascend. This they did not trouble themselves to do, consequently they were at more pains to keep the beasts from falling than it would have cost to lead them twice the distance. Here, thought Fabian to himself, is the sweetest spot in the whole journey for an ambuscade. Scarcely was the idea conceived when a thundering noise from behind sounded as though a troop of cavalry was sweeping down upon them.

"Stand by! Here they come!" shouted Fabian, giving the alarm, and at the same

moment reining his nag as close under the rocks as he could squeeze. Raven followed the example, when, in a few minutes, the noise still increasing, and the rattling of big stones down the steep warning them of the coming danger, the foremost of a train of laden mules came in sight, groaning and sobbing so as to be heard a long distance off. On he stumbled, or rather plunged; for, despite his enormous burden, which was no less than ten arrobas, or over two cwt. of sugar, the sure-footed beast picked his steps between the huge rolling blocks, which threatened to break his slender limbs at every yard.

On passing the fat priest there really was not an inch to spare; the heavy sack squeezed his portly stomach against the wall, and as this happened with a jolt, both mule and priest jerked out an involuntary grunt as the concussion took place. Well our padre knew the awkwardness of his situation. He knew that these mule-trains are most frequently made up

of from twenty to a hundred mules, and, as he anticipated, every one of this train, in which there were more than forty, knocked the wind out of his body as each animal charged past him. At this scene Master Fabian would have gone on laughing for a good half hour, but his merriment was unhappily checked by another sight, of a far less amusing character. The case was this:—One of these poor mules chanced to be quite unequal to the load which its cruel drivers had laid upon its back. It was both sick and old, and had likewise seriously injured one of its fore-legs by a fall. As this beast staggered down the descent, shattering itself to bits with the roughness of the motion, and almost weeping, so it appeared to Fabian, under its oppression, it suddenly took advantage of a small standing-point, where it could recover breath and let the younger beasts rush past it. Hardly had it stood here a minute, when a couple of young mules came racing down together, endeavoring as it seemed

to thrust each other off the path. The poor old mule had no hope to outspeed them in their downward course; but, as if aware from long experience of its impending fate, looked round to see them coming; then, stretching its legs out to sustain the shock, waited patiently till the shock came. Both Fabian and Raven were witnesses of the accident. When the fatal instant arrived, an exclamation of horror burst from both their lips. The young mules plunged on, but the place where the old worn-out thing had stood was vacant. Seven hundred feet below lay a mangled carcase, and the ten arrobas of sugar.

"Thus," said Raven, gravely, "by what at first sight seemed a hard fate, this suffering old creature has been saved from an end twenty times less merciful."

"And so is it" said the priest, who had joined them, "that the decrepitude of age yields to the headlong vigor of youth."

About a mile or so from this spot the three

equestrians overtook an old man and a young girl. They were toiling up a hill well nigh as steep in ascent as the last had been the other way. The old man, having no burden but the heaviest, his age, was helping himself along by aid of a high staff. The girl, to the surprise of the Englishmen, who were little used to such a sight, bore upon her shoulders a great pigskin full of *pulque*, which they calcuculated could not possibly weigh less than a hundred pounds. To be sure she was very lightly clad, having but a thin petticoat that reached no farther than her knees, and an equally thin garment to cover her bust. This dress, which as little as possible impeded the use of her limbs, was hardly sufficient to conceal their just proportions, and so well did she look in it that the compassion of all three travellers was at once awakened to the highest pitch.

Whether the two elder ones deemed gallantry more becoming in a young man,

or whether they, more accustomed to self-examining, were a little ashamed of the motives of their compassion, matters not; practically, no one but Fabian made the least demonstration of his feelings. This young gentleman no sooner beheld the hardships of the pretty maiden than he flung out of his saddle and was by her side in a moment. She, not comprehending his intention, sprang off like a young fawn—forgetting in her alarm the weight of her ponderous load. Seeing this, the old man became speedily invigorated with anger, and but for the timely intervention of the priest, who sat laughing heartily at the mistake, our young knight-errant would have come by more blows than he bargained for. When his purpose was made known, the courteous apologies of the poor Indians surpassed the graceful insipidity of polished manners as much as they exceeded them in sincerity and good humour. The bronze-color cheeks of the maiden blushed for the attention her comeliness had attracted,

and she smiled with a *naivetè* and innocence that went to the heart of her *cavalier*. His first proposition was to set her on horseback and strap the pigskin of *pulque* upon his own shoulders. This she would not hear of, but proposed in lieu to keep her *pulque* and take a rest astride the horse, behind its rider. His sense of delicacy would not permit him to pláce a young woman, even at her own request, in this, to him, very singular attitude upon a horse, so that some altercation ensued, and which ended by their strapping the *pulque* on to the saddle, and going together afoot by its side. So perfectly agreeable did this arrangement turn out, that when they came to a diverging pathway, which obliged the old man and his daughter to leave them, both Fabian and the little *pulque* carrier regretted sincerely that their roads were not the same all the way to Cordova,—nay, had they been asked, they might have named a place as far again.

From this point each of the riders occupied

himself with his own thoughts,—all, as appearances promised it—expecting to reach their destination without further adventure of any kind. Such, however, is the uncertainty of human affairs, that, at the very point—but I know the reader anticipates my observation,—so I will even relate the particulars of a more important adventure than any which hath yet befallen them. This event, however, were best spoken of in another chapter.

CHAPTER IV.

In tropical climates, like that of Mexico, the long twilights of our northern hemispheres are unknown, nor does the heat subside, as the sun approaches the horizon, as with us. Often the last hour before sunset seems almost as hot as mid-day, both air and earth retaining the caloric of fourteen or fifteen hours' baking. Overcome with this intense warmth, and fatigued with the day's march, all three travellers had succumbed, in turn, to its somniferous influence. Raven, who rode in advance, had hard work to contend with his drowsiness, the good padre snored loudly in his saddle, and Fabian kept bowing to his horse's ears, and starting up alternately; the difficulty of

keeping his long body erect rendering the loss of balance inevitable. It was in this half-unconscious state that the little party suddenly found itself brought to a dead stand still. From behind a cluster of rocks, which stood on the higher side of the path, three men, who had watched the gradual advance of their prey, darted forth, and planted themselves one in front of each rider. The nature of the apparition forced itself instantly upon the understandings of the besieged. Cries of "*Bocca a tierra*," "Mouth to the ground," operated electrically on the minister of peace; his eagerness to obey the command cost him a tumble, which he was glad enough to pass off as the cause of his insensibilty. The combative propensities of Master Fabian, however, rose instantly with the occasion. His first thought was to shoot his opponent through the head; but this murderous intention he quickly changed. Digging the rowels into his horse's ribs he made a dash to ride the robber down; this

fellow, however, caught the bridle in his hand; but the moment he was within reach of Fabian's lengthy arm, a blow from our young athlete's fist laid him sprawling stupified in the dust.

In the man who confronted him, Raven immediately recognised Vasquez. No idea could be further from his mind than to injure the bandit chief; he was also well aware the smallest resistance might be the signal for his death-blow from a musket now levelled at his head. "Hold!" he cried, stretching out his arm in an attitude bespeaking forbearance. "Hold! in God's name! Let peace be between us." At this instant Fabian, who had disposed of his own enemy, looked up and saw another fellow about, as he imagined, to take the life of his friend; clearly the moment was not one for reflection, he snatched out his revolver and fired, not to save himself, but Raven. The bullet, strange to say (it being directed by so steady a hand), whizzed harmless through the air;

but the shot was answered—Raven fell wounded to the ground.

Luckily the ball had only grazed the Englishman's head; by a tremendous exertion he rose again to his legs, and, rushing upon each other, the two wrestled furiously for a throw. Meanwhile Fabian was struggling with the third robber, who had just left the priest. It was evident that, in strength and activity, this man was no match for the courageous youth; but the Mexican, in a great measure, compensated his personal inferiority by skill in the use of the knife, which formidable weapon he now wielded with alarming dexterity. At the very first blow he drove the deadly blade through the muscles of the young Englishman's arm—and so serious was the injury thus inflicted that the combat at once became unequal; every moment now was of advantage to the robber—could he continue the struggle long enough, loss of blood would so weaken his opponent,

that an opportunity must at last turn up of settling the fight with a single stab.

These considerations rushed also into Fabian's mind; he perceived that one of his arms was nearly disabled—he was likewise conscious that his strength would soon be seriously impaired. Another disagreeable conviction forced itself upon him; his watchful eye warned him that the man he had stunned was rapidly recovering, and in a few minutes would be fresh for a new assault. Still Raven and Vasquez clung fiercely to each other; his friend he knew to be wounded —he had seen him fall; not the smallest hope of assistance, therefore, could he look for from any quarter. In this predicament, necessity and desperation lent almost superhuman strength to his uninjured arm; with the rapidity of thought he seized the Mexican round the waist, and ere the man could free himself to take advantage of the Englishman's exposure, Fabian hurled him to the ground

with a force that left him stunned, breathless, and without sign of life. Already the knife of the recovered man was raised to stab him; with one spring, however, the youth evaded the blow; and, this time, taking surer aim, he sent a bullet through the middle of the brigand's neck.

At the same time almost at which Fabian found himself released from danger, the pistol of Vasquez accidentally went off in the scuffle, its contents pierced its owner's breast, and Raven, to his surprise, clasped the body of a lifeless man.

Wounded and exhausted as they were, the two friends warmly embraced each other, with glowing and thankful hearts, for the victory which had been vouchsafed to them. The priest, who hitherto had not stirred a limb, now served them, after the fashion of his calling, with right good will; binding up their wounds, he caught their horses, and lifted his friends into their saddles. Fortunately, their

distance to Cordova was but trifling; in less than half an hour they were all safely lodged at the padre's house, which stood about a mile, or so, on this side of the town. At the earnest solicitation of Raven the body of Vasquez was brought to them; the other two men, neither of whom were mortally hurt, were captured where they lay, by the soldiers, who soon got wind of the affray. Sentence of death was afterwards passed upon these, and the poor wretches finally suffered the horrible fate which their comrade Pablo had already experienced before them.

The injury sustained by Fabian did not hinder him from nursing his more seriously wounded companion, who seemed unaccountably to be afflicted, no less with mental than with bodily pain. Both his friend and the priest attributed this to symptoms of fever, which they had good reason to fear might ensue. Raven's conduct, too, concerning the dead body, increased rather than diminished

their apprehension; he could not be persuaded to keep his bed, but several times, in the course of the evening, begged his host to leave him alone in the same room with the robber's corpse. On one occasion when Fabian returned to him, he fancied traces of tears were to be seen in his eyes; not a word, however, was said, except a request which Raven made the priest, to perform the burial early next morning. His anxiety on this score was occasioned by the belief that the authorities would claim the body to expose it publicly for the sake of example. The priest promised to comply with his whim, and they retired to the rest so much needed by all.

Scarcely two hours had yet been spent in sleep when a rude clamour at the outer door roused the padre from his slumbers; at first he tried hard to sleep through the racket; giving that up, he hoped to tire out the patience of his untimely visitors; at length, with many exclamations, more human than divine, he rolled

from his bed, and stepping to the postern-door, peered peevishly through the wicket.

"Are ye going to knock the house down?" he cried, "that ye come battering at our doors like a parcel of heathenly miscreants, disturbing the midnight vigils of a priest with a clatter more befitting a drunken party at a Venta. Who? or what is it that ye want? say!"

"We are sent by the Alcade," said one, "to fetch the body of Juan Vasquez which was brought here this afternoon. You may tell your master, the padre, the sooner he lets us in the better."

Hearing what they came for—indeed he had shrewdly guessed the occasion of this unusual visit—the good man had no mind to get himself into a scrape by opposing the officers of the civil authorities; he softened his tone, therefore, at the same time that he set a restraint upon his ill humour, but endeavoured to put the soldiers away by telling them there were two

gentlemen lying within in a very precarious state, and that were they disturbed it would certainly be the death of them, there and then. "*Mire amigos*," he added, "if you go away peaceably you shall have the body in the morning, and I dare vouch for it, the gentlemen will not forget your forbearance."

"*Hombre!*" cried the corporal, "soldiers must obey orders. If you don't open *amistosamente* (in a friendly way), we shall have to get in by force."

"*Dios mio!*" exclaimed the priest; but 'tis better that I suffer for doing well than for evil-doing; now, you carnal-minded men, enter, and follow me quietly if you can."

So saying, he admitted two soldiers and a corporal, all three of whom he led into Fabian's room. The priest at no time regarded the military powers with a friendly eye; at the present he was considerably put about by the small detachment that had thus rudely pulled him from his bed to ransack his

premises, whether he would or no. In this temper he resolved to give the searchers as much trouble as he could; to be sure he did not at all like being the receiver of dead robbers; but a certain respect that he had conceived for his guests, assisted by a latent faith in the liberality of Englishmen, outweighed this objection, and prompted him to gratify the whim of the elder one, if this could be done by thwarting the soldiers. In conducting these to Fabian, our padre, who never mistook his man, foresaw that the readiness and good humour of the youth would be no small obstacle in the way for the upsetting of their purpose.

Quite awake to what was going forward, Fabian sat up in his bed prepared to receive the party which his host now ushered in.

"We want the body of Vasquez," said the corporal imperatively, in reply to a question put by the other.

"Well, my good man!" returned Fabian,

"what do you come to me for—I'm not the body of Vasquez."

"But you've got it concealed here," said the corporal, "and if you don't give it up smartly, I'll soon oblige you to do so."

"You're very obliging, no doubt, Mr. Corporal; but on my honour I was not aware, till you mentioned it, sir, that I had the body of Vasquez concealed here. Oh! pray look under the bed—there's nothing unusual there. Would you like to examine my pockets? He was very difficult to catch when alive; there's no saying how hard he mayn't be to find now." Hearing Raven astir in the adjoining chamber, Fabian did his best to keep the soldiers still in check.

"I advise you to give him up," said the corporal, losing his temper. "If you keep me here much longer, I shall take you before the Alcade."

"You are a remarkably ingenious corporal," cries Fabian, "if you can carry me before the

Alcade while I keep you here. But," he added, affecting an injured air, "'tis too bad to talk of punishing me, when I have positively done your work on the high-road at the risk of my life. Do you think I am going to shoot robbers for you to bag? No, no! Since you so particularly wanted Vasquez, I wonder you did not take him when he lived! Not that 'tis much to be wondered at, neither, for the deuce take me if I don't think you were all afraid of him."

"Afraid!" exclaimed the three soldiers, in a breath. "We afraid, forsooth! *Vaya!* 'Tis the Americans (they took our Englishmen for such) that are cowards, and not the Mexicans. *Caramba!*"

"Americans cowards!" cries Fabian in a pet. "Who ever heard of an American being a coward? Why, you miserable wretches, didn't we thrash you till, like a parcel of swamped mice, you hadn't a hole to run to?"

"Who says the Americans thrashed us?"

exclaimed the corporal, a little intimidated by Fabian's well-feigned rage.

"I say so."

"Then you lie! and as you won't give up the body, I'll take you instead." Here the corporal accompanied his words with suitable action.

"Excuse me!" said the youth, whipping his revolver from under the bed-clothes, and thrusting the muzzle of it within a few inches of the other's nose. "When a man yields to the impetuosity of his temper he usually finds himself—up a tree. My meaning is, if either you, or either of your men, move head or tail, I'll blow your addle brains into their pudding faces. Just so. Now, let us be reasonable. Wherefore do you want the body of Vasquez? I give you my honour he is quite dead; and, unless you go on searching for him, he will never trouble any of you more."

"We want him," said the corporal, sulkily, "to make an example of."

"Bless us, and save us, man! you must be in a sad plight if you have no better patterns to stick up for examples than he!"

"Come," said the corporal, turning in disgust to his men, "we'll search the house; there's nothing to be got of such fools as this fellow!" With this he left Fabian to enter the chamber, wherein Raven had just been heard to move.

This room, like the first, was a small apartment in which the body had been placed. At the farther end of it was Raven's bed-room, whose other door opened into the garden. The soldiers soon perceived, by the blood upon the floor, that the object of their search had been removed. Passing on to the outer chamber they found the entrance to this was locked from the garden side; after wasting some futile efforts to burst it open, they bethought them of going round the front way; but the night was pitch dark, and, since there was no lantern to be had, they groped about

amid flower beds and fruit trees, catching nothing but each other, and an occasional knock upon their own shins.

Meanwhile Raven was busy with his affairs. He had overheard enough of the parley between the corporal's guard and Fabian to learn the cause of the disturbance; and, though so stiff and giddy as scarcely to be able to walk, he took up the robber's body, and hurrying away with it into the garden, locked his pursuers in behind him. In the exertion of carrying his lifeless and heavy burden the bandage which bound up his wound was knocked from his head. While the blood trickled down his face, every minute found him less equal to his undertaking. The same darkness which frustrated the search of the soldiers, though it served him in this, made it equally difficult for him to direct his own steps. But the noise they made when one of the party fell upon the other enabled him to move in a contrary line to them; yet, notwithstanding

his precautions, once or twice so near came the hider and seekers together, it was only by remaining motionless, or by lying flat down, that Raven avoided their clutches.

Presently he heard the corporal send one of his men for a torch, swearing he would not leave the place though he should hunt till daylight. Almost in despair of accomplishing the task which for some secret purpose he had bound himself to perform, he unexpectedly discerned a dark mass, which proved to be a tool house, close at hand; entering this he felt about till he found a spade, then pushing on till he could hear no more of the corporal, set himself to dig, with all his might, a hole big enough to bury his rescued charge.

When he had completed his labour so far, he sank exhausted upon the heap of freshly thrown up soil; the soft mould yielded kindly to his form; its smell and coolness lulled his fevered senses. Faintness bowed his spirit with a gentle longing for sleep. Hard by the spot

where he lay was a basin, formed by nature, amongst some rocks; a very small stream of water fell into the basin, and the purl of the running water was music in his ears; mingled with this sound were the incessant chirruping of the grasshopper, and the monotonous croak of the frog tribe. Just now the moon rose upon the ridged horizon; her colour was that of burnished gold; not pale as in colder atmospheres. Her disk seemed ten times its wonted size, the petty objects which crossed her light so magnified her grandeur. Raven was conscious of all this; but oblivion waved her magic wand, and a heavy veil crept gradually between his senses and the world around them. A little more and it had been too late. But the spirit and the body, though chained together, are not one—a sudden recollection of the truth gave instantaneous vigour to his will. He flung aside the torpor which oppressed him, and again he grappled manfully with his task. Turning its face towards the moon, a flood of

rays poured down upon the corpse. The stern, immoveable features gleamed white and cold. Their fierceness had departed; yet were they set in grim defiance; oft repeated scenes of danger, of reckless violence, had stamped their lasting impress, and more than one ugly cicatrice registered a tale even uglier than the wound. "Yes!" murmured Raven, as he laid the body in its grave, "since so many must suffer for one—need was that One should suffer for all. God have mercy on us." Having smoothed the earth above the grave, he walked hastily back towards the house. He gained the door, reeled when he touched it, staggered as it opened, and fell senseless straight into the arms of the corporal.

CHAPTER V.

"WHERE is this letter?" enquired Sir Foy of his spouse, in a snappish tone of voice. "It appears to me, Lady Derisley, you take mons'ous little trouble about people who certainly have some claim to your interest."

"My dear Sir Foy," returned her ladyship impassively, "I thought you had seen it."

"Well, ma'am, who said I hadn't seen it? Is that any reason why I shouldn't see it again, if I choose—see it a dozen times—d——n it, ma'am, a hundred times, if I choose. It so happens I haven't seen it at all yet."

"Belinda," said Lady Derisley to her daughter, "have you got Fabian Harrod's letter?"

"I have not set eyes on it, mother, since the morning," returned the young lady; "I suppose Mr. Harrod must have it; it was written to him."

"Of course," resumed Sir Foy, "when I want anything no one has got it, nobody knows where it is to be found—and zounds! nobody takes any pains to look for it. I'll be bound the letter is in one of your pockets now. But women's pockets are like their tongues; there's no measuring the length of 'em. An' I had a way in it, d—mme! but I'd sew up the one, and put the slit in t'other."

"Here, Sir! here it is!" exclaimed Mr. Harrod; "I had forgotten I had it in the pocket of this coat."

"Ugh!" grunted Sir Foy, "like enough. Well, Sir, you don't expect me to read it, do you?"

"Will you permit me, Sir Foy," said Mr. Harrod, "to read it aloud?"

"Yes, yes! you read it, Harrod, you read

it. I never can make top or bottom of a woman's mincing vocables."

Here the baronet made an effort to draw his chair closer to the fire. He was, however, such a podgy little man, and his chair was so much bigger than himself, the attempt threw him into a perfect fury. Having pacified this, and assisted in the movement of the seat, Mr. Harrod commenced reading aloud the contents of his son's letter.

It is not necessary for us to describe the brief notification Fabian had written his father from Perote, simply to say that he and Raven had changed their minds, and should not now be home until the arrival of the next steamer. The letter, it is true, contained some little account of Mexico—some sketch of the passage from the capital—and just as much general matter as the hurry of the occasion had allowed him to put together. It only concerns us at present to notify Mr. Harrod's version of his son's letter, together with the

effect which his reading produced upon the Derisleys.

"Ay! 'tis very nice of him remembering me in that way," cried the baronet. "Just read that passage again Harrod."

"On no account," read Mr. Harrod, "omit to make my dutiful regards to Sir Foy. Your mention of his health rejoices me beyond measure. He is indeed a wonderful man, and will doubtless long continue to astonish us all."

"Bravo!" cried Sir Foy, "the boy is a spirited boy. He is not one of your selfish lads who think of no one but themselves, like most young men of the day."

The baronet's eldest son, who sat by, but had not spoken as yet, here winked his eye at his sister—who at once turned her head to express disgust at the unrefined manner of her brother.

"You heard the postscript, Sir?" added Mr. Harrod.

"Not a word of it. The women never told me there was so much as a single word of me in the letter."

"I never saw the passage which Mr. Harrod has just read," murmured Belinda.

"Shall I read you the postscript, Sir?"

"Yes, to be sure."

"P.S.," began Mr. Harrod, drawing a candle closer to the letter, as if the better to make it out. "P.S.—I have picked up some rather curious little trophies in the course of my travels; and am so conceited as to hope Sir F. will do me the honour to accept some memento from amongst them. Believe me to be your affectionate son, Fabian Harrod."

"That boy has a heart, Harrod!" exclaimed Sir Foy emphatically. Yes, sir, he has a heart!"

"How very odd," said Miss Derisley; "I never observed there was any postscript to the letter."

"It was very badly written," observed Mr.

Harrod carelessly, thrusting the letter into the fire."

"You haven't burnt it?" cried Sir Foy.

"I hope, Sir, you didn't want to keep it! Dear! how thoughtless of me to be sure!" and in taking the tongs to pull it out from the bottom of the grate Mr. Harrod accidentally let the burning letter fall into a hotter place on the top.

"And so," said Sir Foy, "they will be here in a fortnight?"

"Yes!" said Mr. Harrod, "in less than that now. Fabian will be quite a hero when we get him back—will he not Miss Derisley?"

"Quite indeed," returned Belinda, without looking up from her work; "and Mr. Raven too," she added.

"Raven," cried Sir Foy, "Pshaw! I don't believe he has half the spirit of your boy. Never could make much of that fellow. What say you Harrod?"

Mr. Harrod only smiled in reply.

"Ah!" said the baronet, "you are too good-natured to speak up. I wonder you allowed the youngster to travel with a half-crazy chap like that."

"My son joined Mr. Raven in Mexico, Sir; and being such old acquaintances—both, too, on their way home—it was natural Fabian should take advantage of a companion."

"True, true! Travellers can't always choose their company."

"Surely, father," chimed in Miss Belinda, "barring Mr. Raven's political opinions, you cannot say but he is a very good man."

"I don't know what you call a good man Miss. I should call the fellow a d——d heretic. What say you Harrod?"

"I believe, Sir," said this gentleman, "he is supposed to entertain rather atheistical notions."

"Ah! I thought so! Well! they say give

the devil his due. Old Nick 'll help himself in this case, I take it. Ha, ha!"

"For shame, father!" cried Miss Derisley.

"What do you know about him?" exclaimed the baronet. "He's not going to marry you, so you'd better not trouble your head about him."

Miss Belinda sighed, but held her tongue.

"He might as well subscribe to the hunt," put in the baronet's son and heir. "What's the good of a man who don't hunt himself, and don't help other people to hunt?"

"My dear Allan!" cried his sister, "you fancy every one is as selfish as yourself. Mr. Raven does more good with his money, a thousand times over, than if he kept fifty packs of your nasty fox dogs."

"You know you only say that to make yourself disagreeable," returned the brother. "If I had said Raven was a trump, you would have pulled him to bits as readily as a monkey would pluck a chicken."

"Do you imagine," asked Lady Derisley, blandly, "that Raven has money?"

"Mr. Harrod answered her ladyship with a significant shake of the head."

"You think not?" said Sir Foy.

"I fancy not," returned Mr. Harrod. "Though Raven is too cautious a man ever to speak of himself."

"I wonder," said the heir, "if he means to renew his lease of Wyldeacre; if not we must look out for another tenant."

"Ay!" said the baronet; "but I won't have you meddle. Harrod will see about that."

"Pray leave it to me," said Mr. Harrod, "I will see you are not troubled in any way about the matter; though I feel sure Raven intends to stay on."

"What makes you think so?" inquired Lady Derisley, without betraying the least interest by her manner.

"What?" echoed Mr. Harrod with a sneer,

only perceptible to her ladyship, "to be near the Sigismonds, to be sure!"

"He is a very great friend of theirs, is he not?" interposed Belinda.

"He would like to be a near relation," observed Mr. Harrod.

"By-the-bye, Sir," said Allan, turning to his father, "haven't you asked the Sigismonds to dine here to-morrow?"

"Yes, I have, sir!" replied the baronet; "but I did not ask them to give you an occasion of flirting with the daughter."

"You'll give it, nevertheless, if they come," muttered Mr. Allan in an under-tone.

"Fye!" whispered his sister, "you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I suppose, Miss, you wouldn't flirt if you had a chance! Will a duck swim?"

"You know Allan," observed his mother, "Miss Sigismond does not inherit Nordefall."

"Well! what of that, my lady?"

"Merely that you wouldn't be so silly as to

think of marrying a girl with a paltry three or four hundred a-year, I supposé."

"Perhaps, *madre mio*, I should not be so silly as to think of *marrying* Miss Sigismond. But I do not see how that affects my innocent flirtation."

Here the young gentleman stretched his legs on the hearth-rug—picked his teeth with one hand, and thrust the other into his pocket. After a little while he turned his rings, looked at his watch, flourished about a scented pocket-handkerchief of the finest cambric, yawned, and went off to smoke in his own room.

"I am so glad, for the sake of the Sigismonds," resumed Belinda, "that Mr. Raven is to be back so soon. I think they miss him a good deal; at least I know Meriel does."

"I know another person," whispered Mr. Harrod, "who is counting on the return of the travellers."

"Who?" asked Belinda.

"Who? Miss Derisley! How can you ask? Fabian of course."

"I heard from Granstein a day or two since," said Belinda, changing the subject abruptly; "my informant told me Lady Fitzjohn was going to-morrow to stay with the Sigismonds. If this be the case, it may prevent their dining with us."

"That little fool," said Sir Foy, "is always in the way."

"Poor little woman!" exclaimed Lady Derisley."

"Well! I believe she is harmless," said Belinda.

"I tell you she is a fool!" cried Sir Foy.

After which they went to bed.

CHAPTER VI.

Mr. Sigismond—the owner of Nordefall—stood at his easel encircled by a halo of art. His studio was thrown into grey rusty shade. A subdued light fell upon his canvass. The dark recesses of the chamber seemed tenanted by a troop of spectres. These were draped dummies, naked casts, torsos, masks, and limbs. Around the walls hung, framed or pinned there, sketches, designs, and photographs. Portfolios lay open on the floor, side by side with colour-boxes and books of many sorts. Lanzi, Kugler, Vasari, jostled elbows with poets and philosophers of every age. By aid of their dust, resuscitated with turpentine, pigments of vermilion, and white

lead, they took the form of breathing godesses—ultramarine the heavens in which they had their being.

The subject of Mr. Sigismond's picture was this—Psyche. How fond artists are of Psyche! Persuaded by her sisters that her invisible lord is a serpent, Psyche steals, armed with knife and lantern, to the couch whereon he is sleeping. When she beholds, in place of a dragon, Love himself, she is filled with admiration at his beauty, and remains to gaze with rapture on his charms.

He could not have picked a more pregnant allegory from the whole cycle of heathen mythology.

"No," said the artist, stepping back and shaking his grey locks mournfully; "Meriel's nose will not serve for a model; it is neither Grecian nor Roman, and that's the truth of it!"

"In spite of which," breathed a musical voice behind him, "Meriel would not

change it for the best marble one ever chiselled."

This young lady was Miss Sigismond. I should like to describe her if I could; but positively it were as easy to catch a sunbeam—and, now I've used the simile, I think no better could be found. She was so like a sunbeam—so radiant and so joyous. She was indeed a perfect child of the sun, and would bask in it till her fair skin was tanned as "the freckled cowslip." Some might think such tints of health inelegant; but let them see the carmine of her sweet lips, or fancy that colour—snow, milk, or ivory are all too cold to typify it—where envious Phœbus even, she forbade to peep! Her hair—most profuse—was really full of light; it was like rich translucent waves of liquid amber, flowing—nay, overflowing! And as to figure, Venus would have torn her eyes out for envy, had she beheld so exquisite a form.

"What! you there?" cried the artist,

turning to cast a loving glance at her who had stolen unobserved behind him. "I never saw you."

"Haven't I heard an old song about a faithless creature who never had one love in his heart but he had two in his eye? Come, thou unnatural parent, bestow one moment's thought upon thy neglected and much—— Oh! but you mustn't give that butterfly fluttering round Psyche's lamp such a monstrous tail! If that's meant for Love's ideal, it should be lighter than gossamer. An old bumble-bee is more ethereal than this death's-head moth!"

"Too material, eh?" said Mr. Sigismond, stepping back. "Yes—you're right, Merie—*Cumque opere in proprio soleat se pingere pictor*, or, as the paraphrase hath it, 'By nature's sympathetic power we see.' Thy intuition detects the error. There (re-touching the butterfly); is that better? Now, just let me see your nose!"

"No, no; my nose won't sit still; it has to lead me off this instant to meet a friend who's coming to pay us a visit. Who do you think it is, darling?"

"Lord Granstein, perhaps."

"Nonsense!—they've got a party of their own. Guess again."

Mr. Sigismond complied with the young lady's request; but his thoughts were so engaged in the painting, he might have gone on guessing with mechanical obedience as long as Miss Meriel chose to amuse herself with his distracted manner.

"What think you of Goody Two Shoes?" cried she, at last.

"Lady Fitzjohn!" said Mr. Sigismond, pretending to be slightly surprised.

"And she comes," said Meriel, "on the very day we dine with the Derisleys. What must we do with her?"

"Put her in the blue attic," said the painter, who had only heard the last sentence.

"Incorrigible father! What, I say, is to become of Goody if we go to Carrol? It wouldn't be civil, I suppose, to put the Derisley's off on the plea of her arrival?"

"Impossible," said Mr. Sigismond, beginning to attend.

"Nor could we well take her with us?"

"Certainly not. Derisley might be rude. Besides, I don't care to put myself under obligations to any man."

"Nor any woman. Very well, then, Goody must stop at home and take care of the cat."

"Still," said Mr. Sigismond, laying his pallet down, "I've a good mind to send an excuse. I'm sure I don't want to dine at Carrol." Then looking at Meriel, meditatively—"No," he muttered; "why should I be so selfish? We'll dine with the Derisley's. Lady Fitzjohn must amuse herself how she can."

Miss Sigismond now tripped down to the

Lodge gate, where she met her expected visitor. When Lady Fitzjohn recognised her young friend, she gave the reins to the groom, scrambled out of the pony chaise, and hastened to embrace Meriel with abundant kisses on cheeks and forehead.

Meriel's mother, you must know, had died when our young lady was a mere child. Miss Sigismond was, therefore, most fortunate in the supervision of so worthy a friend. For although Lady Fitzjohn now lived in a cottage of her own about a mile from Nordefall, she had, until lately, resided at the house of her cousin, Mr. Sigismond, expressly to watch over the education of her kinsman's child. And since she sought no other return for this labour of love than the affection of her charge, so sincere was Meriel's for her, that the good little woman was no less happy in her reward than she had been in the discharge of her self-imposed duty. The extreme familiarity existing between Lady Fitzjohn and Miss

Sigismond, may at first appear a little like want of respect on the part of the latter; but her superior force of character and intelligence gave the ascendancy to the one whom age alone had placed in a subordinate relationship.

"My dearest Goody," exclaimed Meriel, responding enthusiastically to the other's embrace, "I thought you were never coming back again to the Priory. What has kept you so long at Granstein?"

"The Mountseers would not let me go, darling; but here I am, safe and sound,—and you, my pet?—why you look prettier and more charming than ever."

"Fie, Goody! I'm afraid you must have been listening to the tongue of flattery yourself. Your own seems to lisp its accents so naturally."

"Not a bit of it! Those blushes prove my words to be no flatterers. As to what I hear, you may be sure I oftener listen to praises of

your beauty than of my own. Though that's no great compliment to you, is it Meriel?"

"I see Goody you will never come to years of discretion. But now do tell me, whom did you meet at Granstein? I want to hear about the whole party."

"Well! to begin, Lord Granstein was there."

"He, of course; who else?"

"Mr. Lapwing, and the German philosopher."

"They are fixtures. Well?"

"Lots of county people, I don't remember who—except Mr. Pilgrim—he was there."

"Indeed!" said Meriel, demurely. "He preached on Sunday, I suppose?"

"He did," said Lady Fitzjohn, "and I've been thinking ever since what a wicked woman I am."

"Poor Goody! I hope you'll make haste and grow better."

"Ah! it's very shocking?"

"What, dear? Mr. Pilgrim, or his sermon?"

Lady Fitzjohn shook her head. "Well!" she sighed, "I hope some of us won't go there!"

"If you're thinking of any bad place, Goody, I hope none of us will go there. But they say a certain person's not so black as he's painted; and, unless Mr. Pilgrim is a friend of his, I don't see how he is to know so much about him:—but never mind Mr. Pilgrim for the present—tell me something else."

"What else can I tell you?—Oh! I mustn't forget Lord Granstein—he charged me with all sorts of pretty messages to you."

"I shouldn't wonder," said the young lady, curtly.

"He says he has sent for a beautiful dog from the Alps, on purpose for you."

"If it's a puppy when it comes," said Meriel, coloring, "he had better keep it."

"That's not pretty of you, my love," remonstrated Lady Fitzjohn.

"True," said Meriel. "I did not mean to be hard upon him.—He's a good-hearted boy, I believe; but I wish he would marry and settle, or travel and not come back."

Lady Fitzjohn looked disappointed. "By-the-bye," she presently said, "Mr. Derisley, who rode over to Granstein a day or two since, told us Mr. Harrod had received a letter from Fabian, and that he and Mr. Raven were expected in a fortnight."

"Indeed!" said Meriel, indifferently.

"Indeed!" echoed Lady Fitzjohn. "Aint you glad our old friends are so soon to be with us again?"

"Belinda told me something of their return."

"And you never said a word to me!"

"That was hardly possible, seeing I have not had an opportunity."

"So, they are coming back at last! What

a time they have been absent; surely it must be nearly a year since they left England."

"Nearly two, you mean, Goody," said Meriel.

"Nonsense, my dear, it cannot be so long as that."

"All I know is, if nothing but dates will satisfy you, that Mr. Raven left England on the 4th October, 18—."

"One would think," exclaimed Lady Fitzjohn, laughingly, "you took a great interest in Mr. Raven, that you so accurately remember his movements."

"So I do," said Meriel, frankly. "Next to you, Goody, and papa, there is no one I so much respect as Raven."

"I am sure he is very fond of you," said Lady Fitzjohn, emphatically. "Well, they must both be glad to be here again."

"To judge by the time they have staid away," said Meriel, "the probability is, they found America more agreeable than ——shire."

"I wonder," said Lady Fitzjohn, "Fabian remained so long abroad. If I were Belinda, I should not feel greatly flattered by such conduct."

"If you were Belinda, Goody, I suspect you would not care a straw what Mr. Harrod did."

"What! do you mean she does not care about the man she is engaged to marry? Fie, my dear, you should not say such things."

"No; they say truth ought not always to be spoken. But, if he does not care for her, why should she care for him?"

"How do we know that Fabian is not very much in love with Belinda?"

"I was but arguing with your deductions. I thought, my dear Goody, you looked upon Fabian Harrod's long absence as a proof of his indifference. Of course I am no judge of such matters."

"Ah! wait a bit; we shall be very excellent judges before we are many years older, I dare say."

"*We*, my dear Goody! Are you going to be married, then?"

"I married! No, you silly little puss—not an old woman like me—Miss Merrie I mean."

"Oh! it's me, is it? My mind has long been made up."

"Made up," exclaimed the astonished lady; "to marry whom?"

"Nobody; I mean to be an old maid."

"An old fiddlestick!"

"An old fiddlestick, if you like it better, Goody. But here we are, at the house, so you must come in and see papa."

Instead of entering by the hall-door, the two ladies passed through a conservatory, which opened into the drawing-room. The taste with which this room was decorated could not be more perfect. The furniture was old, but still handsome; and suited well the general character of the apartment. The carved black oak and faded tapestry, were set off by ornaments of modern luxury; and

shelves of costly china, vases of spring flowers, flowers, musical instruments, drawings, in short, all those things which are ever indubitably symptomatic of a fair inhabitant, proclaimed this room to be Meriel's, as surely as the trappings of the studio denoted the sanctum of her father.

"What violets!" exclaimed Lady Fitzjohn, stooping to smell a heap of flowers which lay scattered upon the table, and which Meriel had not yet had time to put in water.

"Poor little flowrets," said the girl; "their wounded stems parch them with thirst, and they reproach my neglect with their dying odours."

"Ah, that beautiful thing!" said Lady Fitzjohn, picking up the miniature portrait of a handsome boy, that lay open beneath the violet leaves. "How like it is to you, Merie!"

"Poor brother! I often keep his picture before me for company's sake, and grow al-

most as fond of it as I should have been of the original, had I ever known him."

"To think so sweet a youth should have perished by so sad a fate."

"Sad, indeed!" returned Miss Sigismond. "His death nearly drove my father mad, I've heard him say; constantly, too, I notice that the thoughts of it are inseparably associated with a superstitious terror of the Prior's curse."

"Alas!" sighed Lady Fitzjohn; "his own brother died almost as suddenly; then his mother was full of strange stories, and she treasured up all the old legends that related to that mysterious ban."

"It is remarkable," said Meriel, pensively, "how time out of mind some fatal accident or other, should have verified the terms of the curse which is supposed to hang over every member of the Sigismond family. I sometimes wonder if I, too, am doomed to suffer like the rest of them."

"God forbid!" prayed the elder lady, with sincere devotion. "But let us talk no more on such a melancholy subject; come, I am anxious to see your father."

Mr. Sigismond was still working at his Loves.

"Cupids! Cupids!" cried Lady Fitzjohn; "you are always making Cupids. I wish you would give me a fine pair of wings, like those."

"Ah! my dear Bessy!" exclaimed the artist; "a sight good for sore eyes."

"But yours seem better than usual," returned his cousin.

"A-lack-a-day!" said he; "they get worse and worse every hour; for I can't tell a madder from a lake now. This morning I found myself painting Psyche's eyes green instead of blue."

"Making a 'green-eyed monster' of her at once," said Meriel. "After all, they say love and jealousy are never separate. But really,

dear father, it is getting too late for painting any longer to-day; I insist on your sparing your eyes forthwith; besides, by the time you have had a little trot with Goody and me, it will be time to get ready for Carol."

"What a bother those Derisleys are," cried the painter. "They always ask us exactly when it is inconvenient to go."

"Yes, darling," cried Meriel; "because it is always inconvenient for you to go."

"You will be amused when you get there," suggested Lady Fitzjohn. "Amongst others, you will meet Mr. Harrod, who can be very agreeable, if he likes."

"I would rather not meet Mr. Harrod; if anything could induce me to do a rude thing, and send an excuse, it would be to avoid meeting Mr. Harrod."

"But, as you never break an engagement, papa—"

"Certainly not; an engagement, however trifling, binds a man of honour; and I hope

none can accuse me of carelessness, where honour is at stake. No, I will dine with the Derisleys, though the d—l himself be asked to join us."

"Charles, I'm ashamed of you!" remonstrated his cousin.

"And what do you intend to do, my Lady?"

"Never mind me; I am always happy, wherever I am, aint I Merrie?"

"To be sure you are, Goody, whether we are away or not; it makes no difference."

"You know I didn't mean that; but since you must so soon start, let us make the most of this sunny evening by strolling down to the well."

For the reader's information, it may be advisable to explain briefly the situation and condition of the ruins which Lady Fitzjohn proposed to visit in the course of her walk. The ancient Monastery of Nordefall, had been swept away ages ago; no trace of it remained

save the materials, which had been used for the construction of Mr. Sigismond's house; now frequently called the Nordefall Priory. In reality, however, the title given to the more modern edifice was a misnomer. For some ruins of the original building, set apart as the abode of the superior of the monastery, still stood above ground; these, by right, properly owned the name of Priory. The decaying touch of time, and the hands of intentional destroyers had, between them, left but few traces of this venerable structure. The only remnants were a broken line of wall; a fragment of the chapel's oriel window; a solitary arch, some under-ground vaults, and a deep well, still supplied with the sweetest water in the neighbourhood.

Whatever might have been the appearance of the ancient monastery, it could hardly have been more picturesque than the house which filled its place. Look at it from which side you would, the outline was equally irre-

gular. Obviously by the difference of colour between the old grey bricks and some of a redder hue, frequent additions had been made to its size, until at length it had grown much too large for the fortune of its present occupier. One remarkable feature about the existing priory—*the* "Priory" we may henceforth call it—was its chimneys. They clustered in groups, or towered singly out of the roof in such numbers, and with such capriciousness of form, that one might have fancied the house built for the chimneys, rather than that these could be separately of any use to the house. Patches of the walls were overgrown with ivy. In other places, clematis and creeping roses were trained with care. The garden, close at hand, was under Meriel's special charge; of that, therefore, nothing need be said. Beyond, in front of the house, the park sloped away, losing its boundaries in a thickly wooded valley, over which again a view extended to a horizon nearly twenty

miles distant. In summer, either at morning or evening, when the low sun cast long shadows, it is impossible to imagine a more lovely piece of English scenery than the eye scanned in this wide and varying expanse. The shrubbery—it was at the far end of this where the ruins stood—thickened and became wilder the farther you got from the garden. Through the wood, however, a moss-grown path was kept open to the well. Along this, Meriel and Lady Fitzjohn were walking until it should be time for the Sigismonds to leave their guest for the dinner party, which one of them, at all events, would gladly have escaped from.

The two ladies were chatting away upon a greater variety of subjects than we could enumerate in a page, when, of a sudden, they were startled by a piercing scream that issued from the ruins close before them. Both hurried to the spot whither the cry directed them. On coming to the open space

which surrounded the ruins, they saw a woman on her knees at the mouth of one of the vaults. The instant she perceived Meriel and Lady Fitzjohn, she ran forward, waving her arms with frantic gestures, as if to draw them to the spot she had left. At first, so great was the poor creature's terror, she could offer no explanation of its cause, but dragging Miss Sigismond by the hand, she brought her to the brink of the opening, and then pointed at some white object which was only just discernible through the gloom of the subterranean cellar beneath. A single glance sufficed to discover the truth; Meriel perceived that the wretched woman's child had fallen into the vault, and an exclamation of horror burst from her lips; for she had no hope that the infant could possibly have survived a fall of at least eight or ten feet. After a short consultation, it was settled that Meriel should stay with the woman, while Lady Fitzjohn ran back to fetch Isaac, the servant, with a

ladder. Scarcely less frightened than the mother, the kind-hearted little widow's dismay changed into despair when she learned that Isaac was out, Mr. Sigismond had gone for a walk, the gardener was not in the way, and that none but maid-servants were left at home. She hunted everywhere for help, but none could be procured. Meanwhile, Meriel attempted in vain to console the wretched mother, whose wailings grew more and more distressful and distressing; at length, no longer able to endure the poor woman's grief, fearing the loss of time might destroy the only chance of restoring the child to life, and astounded at the long absence of her friend, she resolved to make an effort to regain the infant by her own unaided exertions.

Snatching up the woman's shawl, which lay upon the ground, she speedily fastened one end of it to her own plaid, and tied the other to the stem of a bush which grew at the vault's brink. Having ascertained, by pulling at it

with all her might, that this substitute for a rope would bear a good strain, she lowered herself into the hole with a degree of courage and heroism which perhaps no other occasion could have inspired. To her surprise, she found the bottom of the cave covered with a bed of soft sand; and no sooner had she raised the child to her arms, than symptoms of returning life assured her that stupefaction, not death, was the cause of its stillness.

Rejoiced at her discovery, she was just about to raise her voice to convey the glad tidings to the helpless creature above, when her blood curdled in her veins, and the sound died on her lips, as a grasp from an invisible hand clutched her roughly by the shoulder. She turned mechanically, but the darkness prevented her distinguishing the features of the being who confronted her. She could only perceive that it bore the form of a man. So appalled and paralysed was she by the terrors of a situation which she could neither

fly from nor summon relief to, that for a moment presence of mind deserted her. She felt her knees tremble, and a sickening sensation creep over her, as if a fainting fit were about to end the little power she had left. A movement of the child gave a fresh turn to her thoughts, and instantly revived her natural bravery; she hugged the infant to her bosom, partly with the womanly instinct of affording it protection, and partly with a sort of feeling that it gave strength and security to her. The prayers she breathed when she found the man's grasp on her wrist, and heard his gruff voice in her ear, resembled rather the impulses of the body than the supplications of a conscious mind.

"Who the d—l are you, and what do you want here?" were the first questions she comprehended.

"I am Meriel Sigismond," she replied, proud of a name which none who had heard could ever couple with an unfriendly thought.

"Meriel Sigismond!" he repeated, covering his mouth with his hand to disguise his voice, and drawing still more into the dark.

"If you know me," said she, encouraged by the man's manner, "you will help me, I am sure, whoever you are, for I am here to save a poor woman's child that has fallen into the vault."

"I have a good mind," said he, "to take the opportunity chance has thrown in my way of paying off a heavy score which has stood a long time atwixt me and a near relation of yours. Do you know who I am?"

"No," returned Meriel, terrified more than ever at finding the ill consequences of declaring her name. "I do not know who you are; but there are those already on the way to find me here who will fully avenge the slightest insult; and if you stay to menace me a minute longer it will be at your peril."

"Bravo! my little game chicken!" cried the man, with a hoarse laugh, which made the

vaults reverberate as though a whole chorus of fiends had caught up the joke. "Why, this is the fly going to make mincemeat of the spider! To hear you talk, one 'ud fancy you'd got my neck in the halter, instead of your being pretty much at my mercy. Lucky for you, however, I happen to be a tender-hearted cove, and ha'n't no horrid wices about me. But, look 'e here, if ever you blabs about meeting 'ere a one in the vaults, as sure as the name of Sigismond was cursed in this very spot, I'm the man to bring the curse home to ye. Say nought about it, and while I've let ye off now, I may some day live to do you a better turn still."

He finished speaking, and vanished, Meriel knew not whither. Just then Mr. Sigismond stood at the mouth of the opening; a ladder was let down, and Meriel, with the child in her arms, ascended to receive the joyful blessings of the mother and the fond admonitions of her own parent.

The shades of evening concealed Miss Sigismond's pale and frightened looks from the observation of her friends. Their attention, too, was naturally diverted by the original object of concern; and immediately the mother had quite satisfied herself that her child was both safe and sound, she vented her joy in expressions of unbounded gratitude to its deliverer. She cast herself at Miss Sigismond's feet, and wept hysterically over Meriel's hand, and if in the excitement which, in gentle natures, succeeds to such violent shocks as hers had just sustained, a tear also fell from Meriel's eye, Lady Fitzjohn, who noticed it, readily accounted for it by the sympathy which she herself warmly participated.

Glad, indeed, would Miss Sigismond have been to confess the true cause of her weakness. It would have given her infinite relief to relate the particulars of an encounter which—though no longer in danger—she could not revert to without a shudder. But this she

dared not do. For, besides the remembrance of the threat with which she had been menaced, she could not but reflect that if, after all, the man in the vault owed her family a grudge, nothing in the world but his own generosity hindered him taking advantage of her forlorn and unprotected situation. She resolved, therefore,—and hers was a will that kept most of its determined resolutions—never to breathe a syllable of the mysterious encounter. Still she could not banish the subject from her mind. A thousand conjectures coursed through her imagination concerning the strange being who dwelt in so strange a habitation. "Who could he be? If there merely by accident, why so anxious for secresy? Why so afraid of being known? Who, again, was the enemy of her family? And if an enemy, was not his vicinity dangerous to her father?"

There was a something in the tones of his voice not altogether unfamiliar to her ear. She fancied now that, but for her alarm, she

would have recognised it. Yet it was unlikely that he should be known to her. No workmen were employed about the ruins. No persons were admitted to them except under the guidance of the lodge-keepers, and these were the only people who had free access to them, since Mr. Sigismond permitted them to fetch water from the Priory well. This, indeed, had been the occasion of the woman's visit. She was the wife of the lodge-keeper, and had been occupied in this when her child fell down the vault. Could Mrs. Sandford (such was her name) have any inkling of the stranger's identity, character, or purpose? But twist and turn the matter how she would, she dared not speak to Mrs. Sandford nor to any one else; and since it was clear that to continue raising suppositions would serve no end but to worry her, she wisely decided to think of something else immediately the dangers of the vault recurred to her imagination.

CHAPTER VII.

The accidents recorded in the last chapter delayed the Sigismonds so long, that three quarters of an hour had elapsed between the ringing of the Carol dinner-bell and the arrival of Sir Foy's guests. Every one was out of temper by the time the Nordefall party came. The baronet had never ceased complaining from the moment he himself had been ready for the meal. The sparring between Mr. Derisley and his sister had grown more viciously playful every minute. Mr. Harrod kept throwing out general observations in a quiet way, any one of which was acrid enough to corrode the inoffensive old artist's character as a gentleman, or a man of honour. Lady De-

risley smiled acquiescence with them all; while Mr. Small, the curate of the parish, persisted in contradicting a crabbed spinster, who sat near him, whatever she said; and, indeed very often before she had time to open her lips. When the Sigismonds did enter, Sir Foy jumped up so impatiently to welcome them, and in such a hurry, that he tripped against his footstool, and fell flat along the hearth-rug, where, as usual, Miss Belinda's cat lay stretched before the fire. When he rose, the purple stream which trickled down his cheek showed what use puss had made of her time; and a good use it certainly proved, for some how or other the baronet's sufferings soon put the rest of the party into better humour.

At dinner, however, amidst the hum of general conversation, Sir Foy's angry voice was frequently heard; for the most part he would address himself to his apathetic wife to complain, as was his wont, of every dish that came to table. This behaviour made Mr.

Sigismond, whose nature was of a refined and delicate order, feel extremely ill-at-ease on Lady Derisley's account. He, therefore, did what he could to distract her attention. And, in truth, succeeded with very little trouble, because her ladyship, either from use or indifference, paid no heed whatever to her husband's wrath; as for the others they were too much taken up when once in their seats to think any more of their host. Mr. Small prospered famously by the side of Belinda.

"Ho! how very funny you are!" cried he, loud enough for every one to hear him. "You think pale faces and white neckcloths go well together. Well! it never occurred to me before; indeed, Miss Belinda, the remark—what I mean—quite original."

"Of course," replied Miss Derisley, "I do not pretend to say that every man looks well in a white neckcloth; but some do. I always think there is such a difference between men."

"Yes! Oh! that is, yes, there is," said Mr. Small.

"But talking of colours," said Miss Belinda. "Black is a colour I have a special admiration for."

"Hoh! black. Yes! Perhaps you a little flatter."

"Flatter!" exclaimed Miss Derisley, indignantly. "Flatter whom, Mr. Small?"

"Oh! not at all," returned the curate, looking very uncomfortable. "Quite the reverse, I mean."

"That does not follow," sighed Belinda, restoratively.

Mr. Small looked at the convex reflexion of his face in a spoon; then swallowed several detached bread-crumbs, some of which went the wrong way. Miss Derisley was greatly affected by the accident, though not so much perhaps as the curate.

"A most heroic act," said Mr. Allan Derisley. "I wonder you weren't afraid of

meeting hobgoblins, or some such atrocious creatures in those subterranean caverns. I give you my honour I wouldn't do what you did for the life of any beastly little baby in creation."

"My father makes it sound like an adventure," said Meriel. "After all, what was it? Are you going to Granstein again soon?"

"Not while I have so much inducement to stay at home. But about the vault? Didn't you feel awfully frightened?"

"I daresay I did."

Miss Sigismond turned her head.

"Really," resumed Mr. Derisley, "you are so mysterious. I shall fancy soon that you actually did see a ghost."

"You are at liberty to fancy anything you please, so long as you keep your fancies to yourself."

"Ah! you avoid the subject."

"And what if that be my pleasure?"

"It only serves to whet my curiosity. Come, Meriel, don't be so obstinate."

"Mr. Derisley," said the young lady, suddenly confronting her neighbour, "I once before forbade you to address me by my Christian name. It is a familiarity excusable only amongst my relations, or my most intimate friends. Neither the length of our present acquaintance, nor that time doubled, will entitle you to the privilege I permit to either."

"Did you see that aimable look she gave him?" inquired Mr. Harrod, in an under-tone, of the lady of the house.

"It was not encouraging," replied Lady Derisley; "but was it meant as it was taken?"

"It had the air of sincerity," said Mr. Harrod. "At any rate, if she tries that system of flirtation very often, Allan is a bigger fool than I take him for, if he doesn't discover her temper to be less sweet than her face."

"I don't suppose," said Lady Derisley "he really cares for her."

"Send him abroad for a couple of months, he'll meet others who will be more complacent."

"Do you think it so serious, then, as that comes to?"

"Six weeks might do. Allan has his wits about him. His affections are not likely to interfere long with his interests. That ass," Mr. Harrod glanced at Mr. Small, "must not be permitted to bray too much. He might frighten other cattle out of the field."

"He could not have the impertinence to hope it," said Lady Derisley. "Besides, Belinda means nothing."

"May as well stop it; Fabian mightn't like the absurdity of such a trial."

"She'll be more guarded when he comes back."

"I'd have her to practice restraint at once."

"I'll tell her."

"Be careful how you do it," said Mr. Har-

rod. "Don't let her suppose you, in any way, wish to control her actions. The marriage must always be talked of as a thing to which we merely assent; beyond that we have nothing to do with it—you understand."

"They have both had that idea impressed upon them often enough, I should think." returned her ladyship. "However, I'll tell her to be less aimable to S. to-morrow."

"Has she spoken to you lately about Fabian?"

"No, I think not."

"What did she say about the letter the other night, after I was gone?"

"She seemed interested, I thought."

"But what did she say?"

"I don't remember."

"Nonsense, you must remember what she said. Did she say she was glad or sorry—she must have said something."

"She remarked, as far as I remember, that Fabian made no mention of her."

"Humph! did that seem to annoy her?"

"No, I can't say it did much. Indeed, I cannot help thinking she has grown rather cool upon the matter lately."

"I don't know what reason you have for thinking so, unless it be that she intends to marry this scarecrow."

"Gracious! How can you talk such nonsense, when you know she refused Lord Flint's eldest son."

"That pudding-headed booby!"

"He's heir to a peerage, and four thousand a-year."

"Pooh! Fabian will be better off as a commoner, and a better match, unless you want her to marry rank."

"What difference can it make to me? though I must say I should be sorry to see her a pauper, poor child."

"And what does your ladyship consider as poverty?"

"Anything short of two or three thousand

a-year," answered Lady Derisley, with decision.

"Their joint fortunes will be double that, some day, I hope," said Mr. Harrod. "I agree with you, however," he added, most significantly, lowering his voice almost to a whisper, "anything short of two or three thousand would be poverty, especially where expensive tastes had become habitual, and there was nothing to fall back upon but a settlement. Poor Sir Foy! when he consulted me about his will, the other day, I found it was out of his power to do more for Belinda, considering the jointure he *proposed* to settle on your ladyship."

Lady Derisley changed colour slightly, then turned to converse with Mr. Sigismond.

The evening passed away, neither more nor less agreeably than evenings at Carol were wont to pass. Sir Foy grumbled at his wife, and threatened to discharge every servant in the establishment, because his coffee had been poured into a cold cup. Mr. Harrod

spent his time in pacifying, or in keeping the baronet entertained. Mr. Small held endless skeins of worsted for Miss Belinda to unwind. Once he attempted to pay her a pretty compliment, by comparing her to one of the Fates. But quoting a bit of Latin, Miss Belinda caught no word but the *Parsæ*.

"Talking of Parsees," said she, directly, "I once met a Parsee at a London ball, his name was Bumagee Fumagee Geegeeboy—wasn't that a funny name, Mr. Small?"

The curate made poor work of explaining the mistake; but it kept him occupied all the evening.

As for Meriel, after shifting her place twice or thrice to escape the importunities of the future Sir Allan, she betook herself for shelter to the maiden lady before mentioned. Miss ——, whose eyes had never been taken off Allan and Miss Sigismond, except to watch Belinda and Mr. Small, was firmly persuaded that this move of Miss Sigismond was a piece

of coquetry, intended to heighten her admirer's eagerness ; so, very soon, with most transparent carelessness, she requested Mr. Derisley to fetch her a screen. When near her she engaged him in conversation, invited him to sit down, and at last made herself quite happy by making Meriel very much the contrary.

Poor Meriel! how often she looked to see if her father had done admiring Sir Foy's celebrated Vandyke. While he, good man, being three parts blind, could see nothing of the picture but its frame, and stood yawning at it with his back to the company long after it was time to go, simply because he, like Miss ——, fancied that Meriel was as fond of Allan as this young gentleman appeared to be of the girl. Happily for him, for he was too much bored, and too sleepy, even to while away the time by uttering polite platitudes to Lady Derisley, —happily for him, Meriel at last caught her parent winking and nodding to the Vandyke

hero; when once the truth dawned upon her, she soon put an end to their mutual sacrifices. The lateness of the hour made it impossible for Allan to delay them any longer.

CHAPTER VIII.

The lodge at which Mrs. Sandford lived was a straw-thatched cottage in the bosom of a wooded glade, through which wound the road up to the Priory house. In summer, oaks and beeches so hemmed it in, that its position, from a little way off, was but faintly indicated by the wreath of blue smoke that curled above the dark bed of sheltering foliage. The cottage itself was clad in woodbine—about half an acre of cleared ground, stocked with vegetables, and adorned with flowers, surrounded it. Rising from behind the garden, and above the road, the steep bank, sprouted everywhere with golden primroses, interspersed with patches of blue wild hyacinth—all

putting on their brightest looks in honour of the warm young year.

The day was one that no spring but England's ever witnesses. Light clouds floated through the sky, sprinkling the earth with moisture, thus nursing, with sustenance and shade, the tender firstlings of the season. The feathered chorus tuned, with instinctive praise, its joyous melodies to heaven. The venturous rooks sailed forth, obedient to their young one's wants, and laughing jackdaws flocked, in merry mockery, high in the clear bright air.

With spade in hand, resting from his healthful task, there stood, within the garden, a labourer of middle age. The hard toil of husbandry had failed, as yet, to bend or cramp his manly form. When he paused to brush the wages of bread from his open brow you might see that his features were not wanting intelligence.

He looked up to see how much rain was threatened by the drops that sparkled in the

sunshine. Then, as if that upward glance had raised his thoughts from the work at his feet, he smiled sadly and fell thus a-thinking. "England, thou art exceeding fair! such spots as these within a land of liberty seem the very cradles of peace, the very fountains of contentment. I hear tell of no other scenes where repose is decked with cheerfulness as in these little nooks. Methinks when Nature plays at hide-and-seek with the noisy world she comes to lurk in such recesses. Somehow every branch and grey-faced stone, much more the live frequenters, like yon skittish little squirrels, grow to be as constant friends in their faithful daily presence. Long converse embues the mind with a nature congenial to the place's own; and were I transported to the world's far ends, this familiar dale would keep me company to the utmost. The soldier bearing the burden of his country's glory, and of the savage hardships of a war, often doomed to die where he has bled, and mix his dust

with that of murdering foes, no dream unwakened by the roar of death's relentless car, no vision of rest, undarkened by the morrow's pending fate, must often cheer his heart's misgiving by the remembered picture of a home like this. And *he* who in his boyhood knew these stocks and stones, these chirping birds, these playing squirrels, these primrose banks, and aged trees, as well as I, does he not often recall the spot of innocence, of home? Yes! there are to whom such scenes give joy; but alas! there must ever be some to whom such scenes give pain. How thankful should we then be who are blessed with what others pine for. They can but fancy the sweets which we enjoy. And if these woods and banks will not clothe or feed our children, this good soil fails not to render fruit to the strength which heaven grants me to break it." Here the labourer resumed his spade, and, smiling hopefully, turned up the ground with freshened vigour. Thus sped it without.

Inside the cottage, near the chimney corner, wherein blazed a wood fire, surprisingly large for the warmness of the weather, sat, or rather crouched, an old crone, rocking herself on a low stool, and resting now and again to poke the fagot's end into the flames, which scarcely kept her shrivelled body warm. The fumes of a long pipe, whose stem she sucked between her toothless gums, occasionally found its way into her weazy lungs. The exhalations brought on a choking cough, from which the old hag with difficulty recovered ere she set-to cursing the cause that nearly suffocated her. Whenever the pipe was laid aside, her tongue ran maundering on with disjointed sentences, and words—half-uttered words, occasionally complaints of age, of infirmity, of those about her, approached to something like coherency; but these again were interrupted occasionally with fragments of scriptural passages, the adaptation of which could with difficulty be discovered. In the same room with her, a delicate looking

woman, with a child in her arms, plied about, busy in acts of domestic care. At her side, holding by his mother's apron, when her hands were full, was a fine curly-headed little fellow, of four or five years old. Whatever the mother did the child trotted by her with a comic gravity in its chubby face, attentive to every thing; but seemingly resigned, as if every thing fell out in due and natural course. Mrs. Sandford's present occupation was that of preparing her homely table for the mid-day meal. Her progress was watched by the impatient eyes of the old crone.

"Art nigh fit, Jane?" asked the beldame, of her daughter-in-law, when the latter came to raise the cauldron-lid, to try the steaming potatoes. "Surely them taters is done if ever they means to."

"They 'ont be many minutes first, mother."

"Ah! the Lord help us! it's allust waiting now, the old 'oman has to wait on all your pleasures—she has. But He defendeth the

cause of the widows—mumble, mumble—and His wrath shall consume 'em like a fire."

Mrs. Sandford took no notice of these exclamations, she continued her work, too used to the other's testy manner to make reply, though the old woman well knew that her irritating speeches wore away the spirit of her daughter-in-law as trickling drops in time wear stones.

"Why don't 'e give the child to me, Jane? You can't set dinner out, and nurse un' too."

"Oh, yes I can, mother; never mind the child."

"Mind un'! No! Old Molly don't mind the child—hah! hah! I *hate* them as imagine evil things—mumble, mumble. O Lord they shall burn like fire for ever. It is a queer job, though, the child warn't kil't, a' them holes, that it is."

"It would have been killed, mother, if Miss Meriel had not saved it—God bless her!"

"Ay, ay! she had need to save it she had. One o' her family have been worse 'an death to one of mine; but the rich folkes has their day, and the poor uns has their's. What I knows I knows—chuck! chuck!"

"What is it you know, mother?" asked Mark Sandford, with a smile on his face, as he entered from the garden.

"As much bad as good ony day," said the old woman, shaking her head at her son, as he took down his coat from behind the door.

"Why, that's bad hearing," said Mark; "but do you know the best use to make of such knowledge, mother, eh?"

"Let me alone for that, boy."

"The best use to make of it is to remember the good, and forget the bad."

"Forget the bad, boy? I tell 'e when I remember Jack I remembers the good, and when I thinks of Sigismonds and Harrods, I remember the bad."

"Mother, let bygones be bygones. We have

plenty to be forgiven of. Let us forgive others. Mr. Sigismond has done his best for us, I'm sure. As to his daughter, bless her heart, she has saved my child's life—that alone makes up for Jack's fate. Brother Jack, too, might have died if he had stopped at home, for all we know. You forget, mother, how kind they are to us. Why, we shouldn't have this roof over our heads, if it wasn't for Mr. Sigismond."

"I tell 'e, boy, them as injures mine, mine 'l injure them. Talk of roofs, and sich like. Why don't Master Sigismond give 'e work? There's many man and boy o' the farm has less right to his employ 'an son of mine, I can tell him."

"You speak too hastily, mother; Mr. Sigismond has no call to employ me. He got me one good place, and I lost it. He says he'll get me another, if he can; meanwhile he lets Jane and me live here in this snug little cottage along with you. I'm sure we ought not to be ungrateful."

"Ungrateful!" half-screamed the hag. "Didn't he transport my son? and don't he think to pay us for't in this way?"

"If Mr. Sigismond had a hand in Jack's transportation," returned Mark, "he certainly has been very kind to the rest of us. There's Isaac provided for, and as comfortable as need be at the Priory; besides, if we were twice as bad off, 'twouldn't mend matters, complaining; and you know, mother, it frets Jane so to think you aren't pleased while we are with you. You wouldn't have her think that, would you?"

"It frets Jane, do it? eh! I thought as how it fretted Jane." The old hag's eyes glistened at the thought. "I guessed old Molly made 'e all uncomfortable. Yes! I guessed that, eah! The Lord help us. Blessed are the poor—mumble, mumble. They shall soon be cut down like grass, they shall."

While the meal was yet upon the table, the latch was raised, and there entered Lady Fitz-

john and Miss Sigismond. The cottagers rose respectfully to receive the gentle visitors; and Mrs. Sandford hastened to remove the plates and dishes to the cupboard. Meriel took advantage of the busy moment to possess herself of Mrs. Sandford's baby, and gratified her instinctive passion for children, by dancing up and down the vivacious little animal whose existence she had been instrumental in prolonging. The danger she herself had undergone created almost a maternal fondness for the infant, while the baby in turn giggled and hicccoughed with more glee at her animated and joyous face than ever it did at the melancholy care of its own mother. The father of this child had already been up to the Priory to tender his best thanks to Miss Sigismond. All these assurances of gratitude, with a great many new ones, he repeated and dwelt upon, much longer, as may readily be supposed, than was agreeable to the young lady's recollection. Whether the

witch-like acuteness of old Molly's penetration detected Meriel's uneasiness we know not; but she showed a determination not to let the matter drop, however ingenious Meriel was in attempting to pass it over.

"You know, Miss," said the crone, "they do say these caves are haunted. Ye didn't never meet nothing there, did ye?"

"Haunted, Molly! why, I thought you had too good sense to believe in tales that are only fit to amuse children."

"There's no saying, Miss, whether there be or there ben't ghosts. Ye've heerd, I daresay, of the witch of Endor, ha'n't ye? Well! she raised a ghost that a'most scared both King Saul and herself to death. For my part I thinks 'twas a good bit o' luck the Prior's own sperit didn't seize ye down i' them foulsome holes."

Miss Sigismond tried to laugh at her tormentor. "Every dark hole," said she, "is supposed to contain a ghost. You never

met anything there yourself, Molly, did you?"

"I've heerd some terrible rumblings afore now, and has a terrible dread o' the place myself."

"Your ears must be better than I fancied them, mother," said Mark; "you must have heard the mice at play."

"Mice is it? two-legged uns then. Na, na! I tell 'e the Prior's ghost haunts the ruins, and haunt 'em he will till the curse is out, and his sperit rests agin. Ye'll have heard how the Prior come to curse his descendants, ha'n't ye, Lady?" said Molly, turning to Lady Fitzjohn."

Lady Fitzjohn had naturally heard much about the curse in her time. But it was a subject which Mr. Sigismond carefully avoided, therefore she never had heard enough to satisfy her curiosity, or if you prefer so to call it, her interest in the destiny of her connexions. We are all gifted, more or less,

with a love of the marvellous; and the simple little widow, who could at any time listen to a tale with the attention of a child, at once looked to see if Meriel's interference would prevent the pleasure she promised herself, if Molly could but be induced to tell the story. Now, the truth is, Molly wanted no encouragement whatever; she was admitted by every one to be not only the best narrator of the legend; but it was even said that no other person but she possessed a true and complete acquaintance with the particulars of the history. Molly enjoyed this reputation, and took every opportunity to cultivate it; her special form of mind, too, leaned both to mystery, and to a certain disposition to make herself an object of fear. Without waiting, therefore, for a reply to her question she said, "Kase if ye ha'n't heard it, an' ye'll listen to me, I'll jist tell ye how it was."

Meriel murmured something about coming another time to hear the story. And Mark

did his best to prevent his mother repeating what he saw would be disagreeable to Miss Sigismond. But the pertinacity of the old hag, together with the childish curiosity of Lady Fitzjohn, decided the question. And even Meriel soon found herself listening to an account of her ancestors, which, until this day, she had never heard so fully related.

In order that the old crone's narrative may be better understood we shall give it in our own words. We shall also take the liberty to refresh the reader's memory of the date referred to by a cursory glance at the dark pages of history which record the early annals of the Reformation.

It will be remembered that soon after Henry VIII. had defied the terrors of the papal bull, and was acknowledged by the nation at large as the "Supremum Caput" of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, his first act was to vest in the minister, who had probably suggested his apostacy, the plenitude of vicarial

power. Cromwell was delegated as the royal vicegerent, whose office it was to exercise the full authority which belonged to the king as head of the Church, and to conduct the "godly reformation" of heresies, abuses, and errors. The assumption of the supremacy at once placed the command of all property belonging to the clerical and monastic bodies at the mercy of the Crown. This, of course, had been one of the main objects of Henry's policy; and Cromwell, knowing his master's rapacity, unscrupulously proposed, with the countenance of Cranmer, and the support of the lords of the Council, to dissolve the monasteries, under the hypocritical plea of a religious zeal. The scandalous proposition was eagerly acceded to by the king. Commissioners were appointed from amongst Cromwell's dependants. The instructions they received were cloaked under the most specious form; and the visitations were undertaken as if the improvement of the monastic institute

had been designed, instead of its destruction. But to these orders were added other secret ones to induce the brotherhood to surrender their possessions to their self-elected head. The larger houses for some time resisted these iniquitous measures; for their abbots and priors, as lords of Parliament, were able to defend the charges to which their establishments were exposed. A bill, however, was passed for the suppression of the smaller monasteries; and the buildings and lands belonging to them were sold, to the exclusive profit of the Crown, or else granted, by letters patent, to the parasites of the Court.

This brings us to old Molly's story. At the time of the Holy Wars, one Sir Henry de Sigismond, Knight of Nordefall, had, after the example of many other crusaders, made over the bulk of his worldly goods to the religious brotherhood, whose domains already abutted on his own. The knight did not leave his bones, as he had expected, in the East; but after

a long absence returned, disburdened of the holy zeal which glowed so warmly at his departure, and thinking only how he could recover the estates which he had consigned conditionally in payment for masses for his soul. A few hundred acres of the original property had been reserved by Sir Henry as a heritage for his son. Upon these he lived, and spent the remainder of his days in incessant hostility with the prior and monks of Nordefall for the recovery of his forfeited estate. In vain it was that the knight, in those days, appealed to the Crown—neither king, law, nor commons would interfere in his behalf; and all he could do was to annoy, by every conceivable contrivance, the neighbours whom he had before treated with such munificence. Family feuds often become venerable heirlooms. Generation after generation the Sigismonds cherished their jealousy of the opulent priors of Nordefall, hoping always that some accident of superior talent on their side, and

a coinciding inferiority on the other, would give them the advantage they had so long unsuccessfully contended for.

The expected day at last arrived; a Sigismond was born whose lot it was to terminate the lengthy feud. He married young; his wife died, leaving him one child, a son. The boy was reared a page in the house of a noble family. Years of absence estranged the father's heart; report in time pronounced him childless. To this he was indifferent; ambition had long since usurped the place of natural affection. All the energy of his being was concentred to one end, the recovery of the Sigismond estates. He effected this—but how? First, he took the greatest pains to lull the animosity of the monastery by pious acts, by devout demeanor; his next care was to propitiate their indulgence by constant offerings to the prior, by occasional ones to the Virgin. Then came protestations of contrition for ancestral guilt; and, last, the arrow was despatched for the

retrieval of its long lost mate—the remainder of the Sigismond property was given to the monks of Nordefall, and Sigismond himself assumed the cowl. It was a crafty scheme, and apparently the scheme of a patient long-sighted man.

Time wore on, Sigismond, father Gilbert now, rose from simple brother to sacristan, from sacristan to sub-prior, from sub-prior—yes! when grey locks were scant upon his head, and a weight of cares bowed down his neck, when life was ebbing, and family feuds were little worth as family acres—father Gilbert rose from sub-prior to prior. Nordefall was completely his; but he was completely—whose?

These were the days of the Reformation. King Henry had resolved to suppress all monasteries—Nordefall amongst the number. Poor short-sighted prior! what would he have given now for the independent possession of his old few hundred acres? Vain

the regret! Down came the Crown commissioners to prove the monastery corrupt. No charge could be laid or proved against it. The commissioners lost patience, they offered bribes abundantly to the prior. He, good man, was incorruptible! and this provoked them more than ever. Gentle means being of no avail, the commissioners threatened to starve—to burn the prior—for refusing to acknowledge the king's supremacy. No! he would not heed them; neither bribes, menaces nor entreaties could move this patient incorruptible old man. Away went the commissioners, filled with wrath, to report this obstinacy to their master, Cromwell. A short respite from his persecutions allowed the prior to breathe a hope that the storm might blow over, that Nordefall might yet be with him to his end, that the sole object of his existence might not miscarry. But another Sigismond was alive. Never was the family name borne by better champion of the family feud; with

spirit, like unto his father's, from boy to manhood he had cherished the ambition of his race. He knew his father had turned monk; he knew the Sigismond estate was therefore forfeit to the monastry. But twenty years and more had flown since any tiding had reached him of his aged parent. Interest and unresting efforts had helped him to the favour of the favourite. He watched the progress of the Reformation, and kept even pace with the powers that were. He watched the progress of the Reformation, and fixed his eyes upon the monastery of Nordefall. When, therefore, the angry commissioners made mention of refractory monks, superadding thereto malicious charges, Cromwell's indignation found relief in Sigismond's cruel offer.

"Permit me, my lord," said the courtier, "to deal with this rebellious priest; I warrant me I'll teach him to respect the royal will."

"Go," said Cromwell, "and Nordefall shall find a worthier master in a lieger subject."

Down posted the king's officer to take possession in the king's name. The monastery was locked and barred; but Sigismond the younger had troopers with him, sturdy ruffians armed with arquebuss and halbert. Force was used, gates flew open, away fled the monks. All tried to flee, except the aged prior. It was a terrible scene, this sacking of the Nordefall monastery. Night had been chosen to hide its terrors. Inoffensive brethren poured out their innocent blood beneath the weapons of the drunken troopers. Holy shrines were plundered; altars desecrated; images torn down, and trodden under foot. The cellars flowed with wine and ale; such ale, as venerable as potent; here swilled the brutal swine. Some were drowned, and all were burnt. Yes, burnt! the oily spirit, the strong old ale, licked up the torches' flames, and high they crackled till oaken rafters went heavenward in a cloud of smoke.

The prior knelt in his separate house beside a

huge old cross. He thought of serious matters, and doubtless of his family feud. This thought, the very same, spurred on his son; maddened with blood and wine, the hatred of all his ancestry were concentrated in Sigismond's ferocious glare upon the Nordefall prior. Father knew not son, son knew not father. So, one cleaving blow, and the murderer was a parricide.

"It served them both right," continued Molly Sandford, "the old man earned his end, and his ghost shrieked and moaned i' them vaults till more 'an one of his name went crazy for to hear him. What I knows I knows, and hark 'e to this, until the prior's dying curse come true, them vaults will be, in some way or other, a harrass and a worry to the Sigismonds."

"You haven't told us what the curse was, Molly," said Lady Fitzjohn.

"The curse! *she* knows it," cried the crone, pointing to Meriel, "Miss Meriel knows it,

don't 'e Miss?"—mumble, mumble. "He maketh the barren woman to be a joyful mother of children,"—mumble—"and there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. The curse! ay, ay! curses always stick to people, they do. 'I curse thee for a heretic and a murderer,' says the prior to his son; 'and if thou art come to rob this monastery of its lands, I curse thee as their future owner. Thou shalt beget children, but they shall die untimely deaths. One only shall survive to bear my dying curse. The ill that betides thee betides the race that follows thee, and never shall the curse depart until—"

Meriel was all curiosity for the conclusion of Molly's sentence. She wanted to hear if, according to the best authority, the version of the prior's denunciation was precisely the same with that she had before heard. But at the moment the old woman was about to repeat the conditions which should release the prior's descendants from the bane of his

malediction, the light of the room became suddenly obscured. Some person had stepped to the window, had just peered into the cottage, and had as suddenly gone away. No one but Molly would have given a second thought to the event—she paused.

"Did ye see him, Miss?" she asked Meriel, in a singular tone of voice.

"No! whom?" inquired Miss Sigismond, somewhat taken aback by the crone's mysterious manner.

"One," answered Molly Sandford, "by whom I'd like to see the curse's terms fulfilled. Mayhap he'll be that one."

"Whom, in heaven's name, can you mean?"

"Harrod," said the beldame.

"My best of friends!" exclaimed Meriel, her face losing its anxious expression as she spoke.

"There'll come a time, mayhap, when he'll be more. There'll never come a time when he'll be less. An' ye'd win your heart's

desire," she added in Meriel's ear, "beware of them who'd sell their very souls to balk ye. Tarry not—go see to't."

Half inclined to jeer at the old woman's warnings, which she looked upon as the mere outpouring of a crooked disposition, yet,—startled at the words which had been addressed only to herself, Miss Sigismond said to her friend, "Well Goody, if it was Mr. Harrod, he must be going up to the Priory to pay his respects to us, so I think the least we can do is to welcome him."

Lady Fitzjohn looked wistfully towards Molly, hoping to be delayed until the old woman, of her own accord, should resume, and finish her narration. But Mark's mother had seated herself under the chimney, and was already lighting her after-dinner pipe; any hope, therefore, of her speaking further, unless it was to grumble at her daughter-in-law, or occasionally to mutter some scriptural quotation, could only have been conceived by a

person quite ignorant of this singular creature's character and habits. Meriel's friend knew Molly Sandford of old, so, taking leave of the family, she followed Miss Sigismond, and the two followed in the footsteps of Mr. Harrod.

CHAPTER IX.

Mr. Harrod sauntered moodily up the winding-road; neither the tuneful grove, nor the primrose banks, nor the warm spring day had a single charm for him. His thoughts, indeed, were seldom distracted by the presence of inanimate objects; these were not so now. He had looked into the lodge windows to see if, by accident, Miss Sigismond was there; he saw she was there, and had passed on satisfied in the discovery, satisfied also that the discoverer had not been observed. When he came under the shade of the beeches he pushed his hat from off his brow, folded his hands behind his back, and walked leisurely on with the air of one absorbed in meditation.

Whatever were his qualities of mind or temper —we will speak of these presently—one thing was clear in Mr. Harrod's case, he had had very considerable experience, and possessed, in fine, a very considerable knowledge of the world. He fancied that his acquaintance with human nature was infallible. He fancied he was familiar with every avenue by which the hearts of men and women are approached. He fancied that no actions were without motives, and that the great moving principle of all was selfishness. The mistake he made was a very common one; he judged others by himself. He knew his own character thoroughly, and for it entertained unmitigated contempt. He discovered baseness lurking beneath every impulse; he found, in his individual case, Self, secretly at work under every inclination. Let it wear never so nice a semblance to virtue and morality, still, in truth, the motive was but masked, still at core the motive was a bad one.

"Goodness," he would say, "is an illusion which, if people knew themselves, they would cease to believe in. They who prate of honesty must be either fools or hypocrites."

Now, there cannot well be imagined any creed more fatal to the practice of virtue than one which ignores the principle of virtue *in toto*. The consequence was, in Mr. Harrod's case, he never even feigned virtue but for a special aim; never assumed it but out of deference to other people's prejudices. The degree of morality which he practised, therefore, was always most happily adapted to the demand of the occasion. And since his head was not less cool than his heart, he was seldom hurried, by impulse, into acts unapproved by his mature deliberation.

In addition to his knowledge of the world he possessed an unusual share of literary attainment. He had lived a good deal in the society of clever people; had a retentive memory, and knew how to amuse by anecdote,

or to instruct by imparting information. His energy and clearness of sight qualified him for a man of business. His discretion—he cared, in fact, too little about other people to meddle with their affairs, unless they concerned himself—obtained for him the confidence of many who hoped to profit by his shrewdness; and where the secrets of the weak could serve a purpose of his own, this natural closeness had but to borrow the garb of sympathy, and soon he used, as his tools, those who credulously relied on him for support.

In appearance Mr. Harrod was not prepossessing—nor exactly the reverse. When younger, women had admired his eyes. The drooping lids gave them a sleepy look, but it was the drowsiness of the serpent lying in torpor. He had a nose of the ultra-Roman type—sharp, long, large, and tinted. His mouth, naturally bad, was little improved by the projection of a single front tooth, the only one

remaining in that part of the jaw. But besides the accidental disfigurement, this feature had a habit of twitching which its master could not control, although he assumed a severe expression of gravity for the purpose. His address did poor credit to his long usage of society. When he took no pains to please, his want of courtesy was even repulsive; and since he very seldom felt with kindness, his efforts to pretend cordiality were palpably harsh, or else rudely familiar. To hide these defects entirely was beyond his power; but he skilfully concealed from the unwary the sources whence they sprung, by lending to his abruptness the tone of blunt integrity.

Such, in our opinion, was he against whom Molly Sandford had cautioned Miss Sigismond. Now, though Meriel's quickness and penetration were of no common order, what chance had a girl of eighteen or nineteen of deciphering such a character as Mr. Harrod's. She happened to be one of the few whom he made

it his business to please. Did she, like him, look for a motive in every act? No! for there never was a truer believer in generous impulses; never one less suspicious of deceit than herself. With all her intelligence, therefore, she no more knew the colour of Mr. Harrod's heart than she could have defined its complexion by looking down his throat. She liked his curt manner, she thought it odd, and playfully twitted him about it; she remembered him all her life the same. True, people hinted darkly about him; but her spirit of opposition—she had her woman's share of this quality—only rose the higher in his defence, whenever calumny took the field against him; and the more others abused him, the closer she adhered to her friendship.

"In the woods, in thought and deed," said the young lady, tapping Mr. Harrod slightly on the shoulder.

"Ah! you made me start," said he, looking pale.

"Your thoughts must be lively to make you jump so," retorted Meriel; "but I declare you look as if our presence was as unwelcome as unexpected. Has your gallantry taken flight with your self-possession? Here's Goody with a blush all ready for you, and you don't pay her a single compliment."

Mr. Harrod made some awkward apologies, declaring he was only prevented by the agreeableness of the surprise from being readier with his acknowledgements.

"It was most fortunate that they met," he added, "for he had walked over expressly to call on Miss Sigismond."

"Then," said she, "I will no longer complain of your gallantry; for you undertook a great trouble for nothing at all."

"Is then the pleasure of meeting Miss Sigismond so insignificant?"

"The idea has never occurred to me yet," said Meriel, naively. "I meant that your civility was only to be matched by that of our

most formal acquaintances. You called at Nordefall for the same reason that somebody went down a coal-pit to say you had been there."

"My dear Meriel, what an accusation! I called to see you."

"And, having *seen* me you were satisfied!"

"Seen you! when, where, pray?"

"Now, you wicked bad man!" said Meriel, laughing and shaking her pretty head at him; "didn't we catch you peeping at us through the cottage window? Well, well! I see by your guilty looks your conscience must be punishing you, so I will forgive you this once. I suppose, if the truth be told, you have some business with papa, and don't want ladies in the way. Egregious mistake! We have much better heads than you, really. Papa never thinks of acting without consulting me; but men arrogate superiority, as if they actually possessed it."

This little turn was given by Meriel, with

that rapidity of tact which never failed her, to save Mr. Harrod's confusion. It gave him time to laugh the matter off with a confession which happened by chance to be an honest one.

"Is your father at home?" he inquired.

"No!" replied Meriel, "he is out. Look! he is coming through the shrubbery. Ah! he sees us. Why, he has mistaken you for some strange visitor, and is scampering off to avoid us. What a papa it is! I must run on and catch him, or he certainly will give us the slip altogether."

The reader may easily remember some expressions Mr. Sigismond let fall respecting Mr. Harrod, when a meeting of the two at Carol was spoken of. Those expressions were perfectly sincere. Mr. Sigismond particularly disliked his neighbour, nor was Meriel ignorant of her parent's antipathies. Yet, she felt that his prejudices were often no less transitory than violent, and looked upon his aversion to

Mr. Harrod in the light of a whim, which she had only to humour in order to overcome. She half-suspected the truth in the present instance, viz., that Mr. Sigismond had recognized Mr. Harrod, and purposely escaped to avoid him. She, however, thought this behaviour somewhat rude, and resolved to overtake the whimsical old gentleman, and persuade him to face his visitor; but Mr. Sigismond was just as determined not to face him, so went away at best speed. Meriel pressed him close, and called to him; but her musical voice rang through the wood only to guide him the better to a safe retreat. A suitable place he at last found; it was a summer-house then undergoing repair. Inside it were a quantity of planks ready for the flooring; behind these, which stood against the walls, Mr. Sigismond crept, to baffle pursuit. As might be expected, the hunters did not leave this place alone unsearched; no one was to be seen, however; so, breathless and hot, they sat down within

a few inches of their chace. Lady Fitzjohn had separated from her companions; Mr. Harrod and Miss Sigismond fancied themselves alone.

"I shall scold papa well when I find him," said the girl; "he has no business to run away when I call."

"I must come again another day," said Mr. Harrod; "I wanted to see how his picture is getting on."

"He will be so glad to show it to you; it is wonderfully advanced since you were here; why, you haven't seen it for a month; you neglect us entirely now, I shall begin to think we have offended you if you don't come oftener."

"True, but when Fabian comes home," (as Mr. Harrod spoke, he carelessly raised his drooping lids, and turned his torpid-snake eyes full upon Miss Sigismond), "we must get up some pic-nics, and have some fun; the weather will be warmer then."

Meriel's face was placid as the heavens above her. She replied, "Yes, we must."

"Poor boy! it did one's heart good to get such a nice letter from him. Belinda told you all about it, I suppose?"

"She told me you had heard from him. Nothing else, I think, except that he and Mr. Raven were on their way home."

"What odd creatures you girls are! She said then nothing of the spirits he was in at the prospect of getting back?"

"Nothing."

"Ah!" said Mr. Harrod. "What a thing it is to have so modest a creature for a bosom *confidante*."

"How so?"

"Why! that she would not boast of the joy her lover felt at the approach of their meeting. You young ladies have more command over your feelings than we men give you credit for."

The pupils of Mr. Harrod's eyes dilated and

contracted like a parrot's when it meditates a bite.

"Yes," he continued, "we must manage to be very gay when Fabian gets back. They deserve that, I think, after their long separation, don't they?"

"They do, indeed."

"Do you believe, Meriel, you could show a constancy like Belinda's, if you had a lover who left you for two years?"

"Perhaps."

"You are not quite sure, eh?"

"It would depend."

"On what?"

"On the lover, of course."

"Supposing, now, that Fabian was your lover."

"I would be loath to do him that injustice; the supposition would wrong me too, as thus. To suppose Fabian my lover, I must picture Fabian as false to Belinda. To suppose after this, myself constant to such a false lover

would be countenancing inconstancy more than an honest woman should do."

"Excellent logic upon my reason! such a defence would almost imply an attack. One would fancy I had asked you, in good earnest, to accept Belinda's lover for your own."

"That one could not be me."

"There's the very point I aimed at; for if you could not accept Fabian as your lover, and could not love him at all, for greater reason you could not keep to him with constancy."

"You would have me suppose myself in love with one man, and very properly conclude I cannot be constant to another."

"Eh? I do not understand."

"'Tis plain enough. Let it be granted, say you, that Meriel loves Belinda's lover—*ergo*—she cannot be constant to Fabian Harrod."

"I see, I see! you only object to suppose Fabian your lover, because he is engaged elsewhere."

"Oh! commend me to a man that is rational. 'Only,' did you say? It was *only* a bit of fruit that Eve picked from the forbidden tree. But to this 'only' was tacked on more consequences than we know how to deal with."

"Were we all so conscientious—" what might happen Mr. Harrod had not time to say, for ere his sentence was completed, he was felled to the ground, and buried beneath a heap of planks. The scene was worthy of a comic stage. Mr. Sigismond still kept the painful position which had at last obliged him to make the slight movement that had upset his screen. He had got himself close against the wall by standing on tip-toe. His arms and hands were stretched down like a soldier's on duty. His head was twisted on one side to compensate his extended height, and the expression of his face was one in which bodily suffering blended with mental confusion and shame. Of Mr. Harrod nothing could be seen but

his head. At first the shock and the alarm occasioned by it had turned him deadly pale. Rage gradually succeeded to fear, and his features glowed crimson, partly through passion, and partly through the exertions he made to release himself. Fortunately Meriel had received but a slight blow from the falling planks; she now stood on one side contemplating the picture, so entirely overcome by its ludicrous effects, that she could not offer the least assistance, but laughed immoderately till the tears ran down her cheeks. The awkwardness of the predicament was slightly relieved by the difficulty of extricating Mr. Harrod. This being accomplished, the task of turning the tragic mirth, which the two elders at first thought proper to put on, into genuine merriment, fell upon Miss Sigismond; and since the two gentlemen who, for different reasons, felt equally guilty, willingly met her endeavours, in a short time each began to

hope the other would remember the affair as a joke, despite his own inward prayer that he for one might never be an actor in so painful a farce again. When the party got within the house, Mr. Harrod could talk of nothing but painting and the arts. And of so facile a disposition was the person addressed—so crafty on the other hand the speaker—that Mr. Sigismond forgot, while talking of pictures and poetry, who it was that led him on to converse of them. The admiration Mr. Harrod expressed at sight of the artist's Cupids would have sounded like fulsome flattery to any ears but the painter's. Mr. Sigismond drank it in, and thought no draught more delicious; nor did Mr. Harrod forget to disarm suspicion with a judicious mixture of criticism.

"I should be almost inclined to leave it where it is," said he, speaking of the painting. "Sentiment may easily be destroyed by the least appearance of labour."

"Do you think so?" asked Mr. Sigismond, deferentially.

"I do indeed," returned Mr. Harrod, earnestly; "many of the finest works of ancient art—in sculpture more particularly—where you would pronounce accuracy of form indispensable, are positively incorrect in respect to outline. The spirit, the feeling of a production of this kind is paramount to the mere truthfulness of its execution."

"You are right, quite right!" said Mr. Sigismond. "Now, I wish you would just point out more especially any defect in that picture, which strikes you as a glaring fault."

"I could not do it," said the other, "the workmanship is exquisite. One could walk round those Cupids, the atmosphere is so fine! No! my strictures refer to art generally. I intended to convey that excessive refinement should be avoided as carefully as commonplace. Not refinement of thought; but that species of refinement which, in execution,

gives an idea of ornamental display, such refinement is cold, if not vulgar. Something must, in all arts, be left to the imagination. For even when a magic pencil, like yours, limns the canvas, still its tracings must disappoint the still more wonderful fancy which directs it, and as your favourite poet says—

'Verius affectus animi, vigor exprimit ardens,
Soliciti nimium quam sedula cura laboris.'

It is not by too much labor that the artist can hope

'To seize the soul, and force her into sight.'"

By language of this kind Mr. Harrod induced Mr. Sigismond to believe that not a creature between Nordefall and the Royal Academy could appreciate his divine art so well as he.

"I wonder," said the painter, "you don't take the brush in your own hand; with your knowledge of art, manipulation might soon he acquired."

"My dear Mr. Sigismond! colour is an enigma to me, I'd give worlds to solve."

"If you believe me," said Mr. Sigismond, with enthusiasm, "nothing is simpler. There are but three primitive colours in nature. Now, see here; I will illustrate the fact. There are but three — red, yellow, and blue—the positive always contrast with the negative. Suppose, for example, we take a—"

And Mr. Harrod listened with seemingly profound attention to a dissertation of which he scarcely heard a syllable; for while Mr. Sigismond spoke, Harrod was congratulating himself on the success of his visit.

At parting, the painter would have escorted his visitor to the lodge gate. They were, however, prevented going quite so far together; for hardly had they left the front door when Mr. Sigismond, hearing his name in the mouth of some noisy disputants, at the back part of the house, he and Meriel

went round to learn what the wrangling was about.

"I tell you," he overheard his footman Isaac say, enforcing the assertion with no very decent oath, "you've no business here, and if you don't clear out pretty smart, I'll just take and give you more 'an you can eat Master Davy."

"I don't want more 'an I can eat Mister Isaac," returned the other, "enough's as good as a feast, 'specially when it concerns your imperence. But what the squire promised me I 'ont start till I gets; so let's have the horn of ale and the plate of wittals, and say no more about it."

"Not a morsel shall you have out of this house. No! not if you was to die of hunger, and I was to hang for starving of you."

"You'll hang without that, Mister Isaac, mind me if you 'ont. But here be the squire."

"What's all this about!" cried Mr. Sigis-

mond, stepping between the brawlers with an air of indignant authority. "Why don't you give Davy his dinner, sirrah, eh?"

"He's always wanting his dinner, sir," growled Isaac.

"Always! I 'ain't but once a-day, and I does my best not to want un then," returned the other. "But what I says is, is your orders to be obeyed or not, sir?"

"If ever," said Mr. Sigismond, unconsciously piqued by Davy's diplomatic inuendo, "if ever you behave in this way again, Isaac, I'll discharge you on the spot."

"Beg pardon, sir, but this fellow—"

"Hold your tongue, sir! How dare you answer me? Am I to be dictated to by my own servants? But it's always the way, the more indulgent a master is, the worse he is served."

"Come papa, dear," said Meriel, who saw that Mr. Sigismond had worked himself into

a passion. "You have scolded enough this time. Let us go."

But Mr. Sigismond's choler had not quite subsided. When, therefore, Isaac skulked surlily away, muttering malicious intents respecting Davy, the old gentleman turned to reprehend the other offender. Davy's nominal calling was that of mole-catcher to the master of Nordefall, his actual occupation was gossip-in-chief to the whole district. Be it remembered, however, Davy's meddling propensities were not positively mischievous. He, like many other people, was a gossip from three principal causes—he loved society, he had nothing to do, and to meddle had become habitual with him. He would at any time as soon serve a friend as play a trick on an enemy. The grounds of Mr. Sigismond's rebuke were Davy's idleness and ubiquity; thus charged, the mole-catcher appealed to Miss Meriel; declaring she could answer for him, there was not a mole on the property.

"What does Miss Meriel know of the matter?" asked Mr. Sigismond, involuntarily softening at the mention of her name.

"What does she know!" exclaimed Davy. "Why, Miss Marrywell walks over more ground in a week than the Nordefall carrier travels in six months; and though she'll have been over every hill and dale on the estate, I warrant them pretty little feet ha'n't crushed a mole heap this spring; though, sure enough, if I wasn't to worrit the varmints night and day they'd turn the bowels of the earth inside out, they would. But speaking of moles," said he, "the creturs had like to had a fine time of it just now. How so? Why, that peppered menial of your honor's swore he'd do for me. He's a proper bad lot is Isaac!" and Davy shook his head as if he knew more to Isaac's disadvantge than he cared to speak of.

"Come, Davy!" remonstrated Miss Sigismond, "I daresay you were both to blame."

"That don't make he no better, though I were twice as big a rogue as I be. 'Taint that; I can't abide him, miss. But I warns you, he was ever one of the worst of the Sandfords; and since he've mounted them plush expressibles, burn me if he aint serving the devil in your livery."

Meriel not wishing to encourage this uncharitable vein, reprovingly told Davy she thought he had been better tempered; and without waiting for his answer left the mole-catcher to ruminate on her rebuff.

As soon as Mr. and Miss Sigismond were gone, Davy looked wistfully at the kitchen door. Lacking the courage to beard Isaac in his own den, he caught up his spade, and bent his steps in a contrary direction.

CHAPTER X.

That we may tell a man's character by the company he keeps is but a shallow truth,—or to borrow a better phrase from the wise Sir Joshua Reynolds—it is but a "truth by courtesy." When Fate assorts our lots, it does not consult our inclinations. Indeed, the obligation to "Hob and Nob" with beings between whom and ourselves there exists the widest incompatibility, and the still bitterer struggle to bear separation from the choicest of all our choosings, are such unpleasant and unanswerable refutations of the aphorism, I wonder courtesy is not choked by the lie. Perhaps where a man's only, or chief companions are those of his selection, the contest

may be worth a trifle—but who could have deciphered Raven's character, for instance, from the company he kept, albeit it were told that this man's constantest associates were books? Books! why small though his library was, the gravest or most fanciful might have found their match there. Yet, old world sages, and simple Bœotians, *Schwärmern* of the cloud-painting school, and the Procrusteses who stretch or mutilate all to the dimensions of their own iron measure—were alike the hourly companions of this reader. The house he lived in might, perhaps, be more indicative. It was a lonely house, and strangely situated. No habitation stood within two miles of it. Wyldeacre was its name, and a lake and a morass surrounded the little hill whereon this residence was perched. In olden times the monks of Nordefall were supplied with fish and fowl from these fenny regions, and here, in this same solitude of Raven's, the fowlers used to dwell. The Derisleys owned the

property now, and some little piece of land reclaimed gave to the spot the title of a farm.

Now for a glance at the man himself "at home." It was about a week after Mr. Harrod called at Nordefall that Raven returned to his desolate abode. He had not long been back when, in accordance with a proposal of Fabian's, he sent an invitation to the Derisleys and Sigismonds to come and spend the day upon the lake at Wyldeacre. All had accepted the invitation, the necessary preparations were made, and on the evening preceding the meeting, Raven sat ruminating by himself in his gloomy study. The room was dimly lighted by a shaded lamp. In one corner, upon a wooden cross, was perched a crested eagle. Raven paced to and fro, coming so near the eagle, that each time the man approached, the bird threw back its head, and opened its wings as if in self-defence. When the man's back was turned, the eagle alternated his watch on him with a glance at

the fire—thinking, perhaps, how blood-shot was the eye of heaven. "To-morrow," mused Raven, "my lease of Wyldeacre expires. My second lease. For twice seven years this house has been my home. These terms are longish stages on the way to—change, change! Whether definite or indefinite, I wonder? If complete, as from identity to mysticism, what matters the pre-condition? If progressive, then must it be to continue what is here begun! In twice seven years, something of this onward course should be made out, I think. What tale do these journals tell?—unforgetting and unforgiving witnesses of the past that they are! Come, here's one that exceeds the date. 'Tis nearly twenty years since 'twas written. Hum, hum! hope for ever blasted—the world a blank—and I left desolate—alone. An accident which befalls most young gentlemen before they leave their teens. What have we here?—If mercy be an attribute of heaven, may all the actions of

this brain be palsied—let madness save my misery! Still in the tragic vein! Oh, here's a page six years newer—what does this say? Is passion power? How convert passion into action? Is suffering an end or a means? What proportion of human ills arise from the ganglionic centres? How much happens of God's will—how much of man's? Do his miseries most declare the sublimity of man's aspirations, or the baseness of his nature? Where ends cerebration? Where begins responsibility? Is truth one to all? &c., &c.

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"Five pages of queries and not a single answer! Ah! here we are at thirty. Thought, reason, soul, mind! To have these not is to be—they say—a brute. To be wholly with them—a spirit. To be part with, part without—man. Well, the blessing and the curse bear just proportion. For to be half spirit is perhaps a blessing: to be half brute is

assuredly a curse. All mind—how would that be? Let's think. Mind would be absolved from need of carnal feeding. Good. From need of rest. Hum—no rest? To keep the soul for ever on the rack of thought were hell indeed! But let us say all brute—unsentient that is. The toad crawls with equal pleasure in sewers or violet beds. What toad ever said so? And then with *pleasure* not. Though free, perhaps, in all its lots from pain. Then comes the question—is pleasure not worth purchasing with a pang or two? Is light worth the cost of darkness, or were chaos a better state? But where is light, where is pleasure, or can man be happy? 'Not by what he has, but by what he is,' says one. 'Not by what he is, but by what he is to be,' says another. If both be right—as it seems they should be—then both are wrong; for contradictions cannot agree. Some say, 'Hope.' Be it so; and hope becomes a substitute for happiness. That is, man becomes

happy by deception. Suppose us freed of this deception—no real happiness, no false hope! Hum! *Voi chi entrate*, at the gates of hell read, *lasciate ogni speranza.* A poet's fancy could make no worse. Better then—for it comes to this — the substitute for happiness than no substitute, no happiness. How, when we are passion drunk, we do 'speak parrot' and 'discourse fustian with our shadows,' to be sure. After all, Fenelon is right—*Nous ne serons jamais si raisonables que quand nous cesserons d'etre si raisonnants.*"

"Eagle!" said Raven, shutting the journals and striding to the perch, "thou art reasoning now in spite of Fenelon and my folly! What deduction would'st thou come to, old bird? a pellet of raw beef? Yes! we both have fasted since early morning. Hunger is keen in both, and, but for thy greater terror, I might be thy meal; while, wert thou a daintier fowl, with no less relish I could break my fast on thee! Here are pellets for your maw! Catch!"

The eagle screamed, and, flapping its vast wings to preserve its balance, caught the piece of meat which Raven threw to it.

"For the matter of appetites," pursued the man, "there is not much to choose between us, though, certes, mine are fiercer and more multiplied than thine:—withheld from food thou would'st pine to a woful tameness, then die without a murmur.—Treat man the same, he'll rave terribly, then tear his living fellow to bits, then bolt him horribly. As to other varied forms of appetite, since here incarcerated, all passions with thee merge in this one —hunger; while mine — woe's me!— are monstrous as they're many." . . .

Raven sat down by the sinking fire, and in half an hour's time his ethical mood had passed away. When he got up again, the first thing which attracted his attention was, the plate of raw meat, the eagle's supper. He took it up and held out a morsel of the food, which the bird greedily snatched at.

"Come, come," said the man, "manners, friend Aquila; don't be so greedy, you brute."

The next piece of flesh Raven kept back—that is, he first thrust it under the eagle's beak, and then, when the bird pecked out, rapidly withdrew it. Twice or thrice this happened in succession; until the eagle ceased, apparently, to take notice of his master's tricks. Presently, Raven also provoked, by the bird's sulkiness, held the meat to its very nose. Instantly, the eagle struck out — not at the flesh—but at Raven's hand. A combat ensued. Spreading its powerful wings, the royal bird beat them about Raven's head, fighting at the same time with its formidable beak and talons. The unexpected onset, and the streperous blows which stormed in Raven's face so bewildered him, that he found it impossible to ward them off. At last, he threw the eagle on its back, and there the battle ended.

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On the following morning the weather was not quite so promising as could have been desired for a day of out-door pleasure. It seemed doubtful whether the heavy clouds would turn to rain or wind. Wet, however, held off till noon, so that Raven began to look for the arrival of his friends. The first to present himself was his late travelling companion, Fabian Harrod; a little later, Lady Derisley and her daughter drove up, accompanied by Fabian's father and Belinda's brother, both on horseback. Greetings took place after the ordinary fashion, every one of the company making some surmise upon the prospects of a dubious day.

"Weren't they good, to keep their engagement?" Lady Derisley asked.

Her daughter rejected the proposition, declaring they only followed their own inclinations in doing so. What she wanted to know was, the chance of the Sigismonds coming, foul or fair. Raven could not guess, but

thought they were bound to give the others half an hour's grace, after which, he proposed, they should sit down to luncheon. Fabian suggested that in the mean time their host should entertain his guests by exhibiting some of the many curiosities which he had collected in the course of his various travels. Lady Derisley seconded the request, so that Raven had no choice but to comply. Miss Belinda was in raptures with everything; she had never seen so many wonderful trophies, nor had pictured to herself a more snug retreat than Mr. Raven's. She no longer wondered that he preferred the charms of solitude to the vortex of society. If she had been a man this was the very spot she should choose to live on. It quite realised those beautiful lines of Tennyson:—

'Tis the place and all around it: as of old the curlews call;
Dreary gleams about the moorland flying over Locksley Hall.

"At least," said Fabian, "the 'dreary gleams' are apposite."

"I wish Miss Derisley," said Raven, "you would explain to me the syntax of those 'dreary gleams.' Whether of old the curlews call the gleams, or whether the 'flying' belongs to the gleams or to the curlews, or whether the gleams and the curlews fly together over Locksley Hall, or whether they fly 'all around it' first, and then fly over?"

"Now, really, Mr. Raven," cried the young lady, "you are too bad! I thought you had a soul for poetry—indeed I know you once published some poems of your own!"

"Which folly was atoned for at the cost of their suppression before I was twenty years of age."

"Oh! I should so like to see a copy while the others are looking at the curiosities. They are not half so worthy of your compositions as I."

"Is that meant in compliment to the verses or the company?" asked Fabian, turning round.

"You" returned Miss Belinda, darting an indignant look at the speaker, "are the last person I should either bestow a compliment upon, or expect one from."

"Sweets to the sweet," said Fabian, going back to a closet, full of foreign trophies.

"What's this skull?" inquired Lady Derisley.

"A mere phrenological specimen," was the answer.

"You are a great believer in that science, are you not, Mr. Raven?"

"In the science, but not in the application of it."

"Oh! do tell me my character," said Belinda, hastening to take off her bonnet.

"You have a great many bumps," said Raven, seriously.

"Ah! I knew I had! But I am dying to hear what they are."

Raven performed certain preliminary manipulations, at the conclusion of which, "You

must not think I am flattering," said he. Miss Derisley promised to believe him sincere. The manipulator then pronounced a string of hard words, most of which he coined for the occasion.

"But how," exclaimed Belinda, in dismay, "am I to comprehend the meaning of these extraordinary terms? Do explain, I beg of you!"

"'Tis very well to say explain," replied Raven. "You forget that phrenology is an empirical science; and that the difficulty of comparing the perceptive with the reasoning, the intellectual with the moral faculties, balancing these again with individual temperaments, and taking into consideration sentiments and emotions as operated upon variously under every varying phase of physiological configuration, is almost insurmountable."

Miss Derisley declared herself to be dissatisfied with Mr. Raven's mode of evading her request.

"Belinda expects too much," said Lady Derisley. "Will you try what you can make of my head?"

Raven saw no way of entertaining his guests better than that of complying with their own wishes; so, smiling in his sleeve at the mixture of vanity and credulity, which is always to be met with when a person imposes on others by professing an unusual insight into character, he performed his part over again very much as he had played it before.

"And pray, Mr. Raven," exclaimed Lady Derisley, when he had made an end, "what is the meaning of 'mulierositas,' which you pronounce to be the prevailing feature of my character?"

"That," he replied, "is more than I can tell you; for were I to attempt an explanation, this quality would appear to be made up of the most incongruous opposites that are to be met with in human nature. Yet, for all that, it s (as in your case) the very nucleus and es-

sence of the characters of at least one-half the human race. The word itself was invented by Cicero."

"And philoseipsity!" asked Lady Derisley; "what does that mean?"

"Oh!" said Raven, "this is one of the most valuable qualities Providence has supplied to us. It is essential to success in this world, and, carefully cultivated, will doubtless meet with its reward in the next."

While the ladies were occupied in this manner with their host, Allan Derisley, taking advantage of Raven's good nature in permitting his friends to ransack his closets indiscriminately, had pulled down a small box which, being locked, greatly excited Mr. Derisley's curiosity. The attention of the rest being called to the same object, Raven was intreated to open this box, despite an evident objection which he showed, but which no one seemed disposed to consider.

"I know not," said he, "if the box can be

opened. It is some time since it was moved, and I perceive there is no key to it."

"Oh!" said Allan, "here is the key; it fell out as I took the box down."

Raven accepted the key, and made a fumbling effort to introduce it into the lock. "It wont open!" said he; "and if it would I don't believe there's anything in it but rubbish." With this he put it aside, and, dropping the key into his pocket, proposed they should pay a visit to the eagle, now moved to the outside of the house. But so much was Belinda's curiosity heightened by Raven's desire to lead them away, that she slipped back to the study and began to try a bunch of her own keys. An exclamation of pleasure burst from her lips just as Raven returned to find the box open in her hands.

"Miss Derisley!" he commanded, in tones that admitted of no disobedience, "I forbid you to touch the contents of that casket!"

Miss Derisley looked, as she really felt her-

self to be, in a very foolish predicament. Her color changed, and it seemed doubtful, to judge by her expression, whether she contemplated getting out of her difficulty by laughing or by tears. This unenviable state was in no wise mitigated by the feeling, that the eyes of all witnessed her discomfort. There was nothing, however, either to be said or done; so she stood as she was detected, holding a trinket in the air, and muttered mechanically, "A locket!" Raven took the jewel, and reclosed the box. Before, however, replacing it in the cupboard, he raised the lid to see if its other contents were undisturbed. He smiled when he found they were so,—but his smile was followed by a cloud which again passed from his face as rapidly as it came there. He still held the trinket in his hand.

"You may look at it if you please," he said, giving it back to Miss Derisley. Every one was surprised at his indifference.

"What makes the gold brown and dirty?" inquired Lady Derisley.

"Blood! said Raven."

"Blood!" echoed all.

"Yes" he answered, with a smile. "It sounds tragical doesn't it? You'll see more if you open it." Miss Derisley instantly complied—the locket was in two partitions, on one side was a stiffened lock of hair; on the other a small slip of the thinnest foreign letter paper folded up so as to fit the cavity. Miss Derisley carefully extracted the contents of this side and laid them open by Raven's direction; only the outer fold had been stained and discolored, so that the following words, written very small, were still legible; at Raven's own request the young lady read them aloud:—"Wherever you may be my prayers will be with you. But we *must* be patient. Yours, M."

"What a tale of woe" said Belinda, "is told in these few words."

"I can tell you the whole in one minute" said Raven, "if you are curious to hear it."

He was entreated to go on, which he did, as follows.

"I am no story-teller, indeed if I were, unless I should invent materials, I have none to swell the little incident I am about to relate into the importance of a tale. If there be interest attached to the history of this trinket, it does not in the least degree depend on its narrator—for let any one repeat the story as they will, this witness (holding up the locket), as Miss Derisley says, must always speak for itself—and the words you have just read can never be unwritten. Fifteen years ago I held a commission in the Spanish army. In 1811 the allies besieged Barrosa. At that battle I had command of a company of Spanish infantry. You all know the particulars of the attack, and remember how shamefully the Spaniards deserted their gallant allies, leaving them to fight single-handed against a

French force three times as strong as the British. It so happened, our general's aide-de-camp being killed, that I, who was at his side at the moment, was ordered to jump into the vacant saddle and carry the orders which the General was in the act of delivering. My instructions were to communicate with the commanding officer of the British troops. In the fulfilment of this duty I had to pass through the advancing columns of the English. —They were charging as I rode by them, and mingled with their cheers I could every now and then distinguish a shout of contempt directed at me, or rather I should say at the uniform I wore, and was myself ashamed of. —Amidst these shouts and cheers, and above the roar and din of battle, I suddenly heard my own name called out.—I instantly looked around me in hopes of recognising a friend, whom probably I should never have another chance of meeting alive. There was not an officer near whom I knew.—Again, close by

me, my christian name was shouted aloud.—I then saw, to my surprise, an old Etonian chum hurry past me—to my surprise I say, for he was serving in the army as a private soldier. We kissed hands, for he was just out of reach, and at such a moment there was no stopping even to draw breath.—There, thought I, goes to the shambles one of the bravest and kindest creatures who'll fight or bleed to day.—And sure enough my thoughts proved true—I found his body that night on the parapet of the fortifications, riddled with bullets, and pierced through and through with bayonet wounds. I superintended his burial, and from off his neck I cut — the chain was rivetted—I cut this locket, and of all the trophies I possess there is not one I value so much as this."

"No wonder!" exclaimed Lady Derisley. "But did you never discover who M. was?"

"There was no difficulty in finding that out" said Raven. "My friend's family were

perfectly well known to me; I soon learnt from them the romantic history of the locket."

"Of course" sighed Belinda, "M. died of a broken heart."

"Of course she did no such thing," said her brother.

"No!" said Raven, "she did not die.—She had been married to another man for nearly two years."

"The wretch!" exclaimed Belinda.

"Yes," said Raven drily. "And I discovered there were two other men in the Peninsula both possessing locks of that charming creature's hair."

"Sic crescit numerus sic fiunt octo mariti
Omnique per autumnos; titulo res digna sepulchri."

quoted Mr. Harrod.—"A circumstance worthy a title on all their tombs."

A good half hour had now elapsed, still no Sigismonds came. It was therefore agreed that luncheon should be no longer delayed. When

it was over, "I wonder," began Belinda, "if those people intend to come. They are, without exception, the most abominable dawdles in the world—never in time for anything."

"If they are not here soon," said Mr. Harrod, "we really ought to start. We are losing the best part of the day; and I am afraid it will be very cold for the ladies, if we remain out late."

"Yes," added Lady Derisley, "I do think we have waited long enough, we can always put in shore and pick them up."

"It's no use being in such a confounded hurry," rejoined Mr. Allan. "Half the joke is having old Sigismond in the boat."—

"To say nothing of his daughter," observed Miss Derisley, in a stage whisper.

"Well, my dear Bell, you have two or three men to flirt with, why shouldn't I be amused too?"

In reply to this provoking speech, the young lady pinched the fleshy part of her

brother's arm. As she drew her hand away, he caught his sister's fingers a smart rap with a fork. This hurt so badly, she bit her lips for pain. Mr. Harrod now busied himself in helping Lady Derisley on with her shawl; and though Raven and Fabian both seemed to contrive delay, the lead the others took they were obliged to follow.

When the party got to the water's edge, they found Davy in charge of the boat, which he had cleaned and cushioned, ready for them The little vessel had been constructed expressly for sailing on the lagune. Its build, therefore, was on a model which ensured safety rather than speed. For while its breadth—or what in nautical phraseology is termed "beam"—bore such proportion to its length that it would with difficulty have capsized—a deck which covered all but the steerage effectually prevented it filling with water, even should a sudden squall force the little craft "gunwale under." The keeping

of this pleasure boat was entrusted to Davy, but not the sailing of it. He had never even been further in the "Pomme de Terre"—such was her name—than would have taken him out of his depth. Mr. Harrod was no sailor either; and Allan Derisley's sea-faring experience was confined to the waters of the Isis; so that Raven and Fabian constituted, on this occasion, the entire crew. It was remarkable how much lacing and unlacing—how much hoisting and hauling—these two found to be done, before the "Pomme" could be got under weigh. In vain the two ladies and two gentlemen passengers assured the others the yard was close to the mast. Fabian declared it was not yet what he called "chock a block," and so lustily did Raven and he tug to effect this end, that, after hauling and straining with all their might, bang went the stranded rope, and down came yard and sail—crew and captain—with a crash, upon the deck. At least three quarters

of an hour were now consumed in reeving new ropes, and completing other requisite fittings. At last everything was ready, and Davy was receiving orders to cast off, when three figures made their appearance on the hill, waving their handkerchiefs as they came running down with all haste towards the boat. Meriel—for she it was, with Lady Fitzjohn and Mr. Sigismond—made a thousand apologies for being late; but so beaming was her face with smiles—the blushes on her cheeks so heightened her beauty—she looked so fresh, so bright, so enchanting—that although half the party already aboard wished her elsewhere, her presence much more than counterbalanced the consequence of their annoyance, in the consideration of the remaining three. Her meeting with the two travellers—Raven and Fabian, that is—was the first which had taken place since their return. Her response to the warm greeting with which the elder of the two expressed the sincerity of his pleasure

was most cordial. To Fabian, on the other hand, she had but a moment to say "How d'ye do?" in. For the boat having been shoved off directly the new comers were on board—and he having the management of the sails—the breeze, which now blew pretty fresh, began to flap these about with such violence that it demanded all the young navigator's exertions to control them.

When the jib was set, and the sheets hauled aft, the water purled and rattled under the ribs of the "Pomme" right musically, and the tight little craft ploughed through the lake, leaving a white and sparkling furrow behind her. The course agreed upon was to the most distant end of the lake—that being the freest from shoals or sand banks. Belinda, much against the will of her brother, took upon herself the duties of pilot. But her unskilfulness at this important post obliged Raven to keep his hand constantly on the tiller. Yet, even his attention being fre-

quently diverted by the general conversation, the boat's head would now and then flap into the wind, and every one of the passengers, in consequence, get well splashed with spray from top to toe. At length, the murmurs of the whole party—supported by the polite hints of Raven himself—induced Miss Derisley to resign her place. She, however, gave it up with reluctance, and showed afterwards so much sullenness and bad humour, that Lady Fitzjohn,who could not bear to see any one out of sorts, declared she would sooner be drenched to the skin than have Belinda lose the pleasure of wetting her. Naturally, the proposal to reinstate the deposed steerer met with no favor, but being rejected, added very considerably to the distress of the aggrieved young lady.

Fortunately, there was one person in the boat who, unlike the rest, escaped the depressing influence of Miss Belinda's dumps. Mr. Sigismond, in the first place, could not see, and therefore could not

sympathise with, the expression of her face. Secondly, his whole attention being absorbed either in Meriel, or in thoughts about his art, it seldom happened, and did not happen now, that he took notice of such trivial episodes of everyday life as the above. Unaffected, therefore, by the pervading chill, which the ill-nature of one in a party never fails to cast over the whole, he seized the opportunity afforded by the general silence to descant with great fluency upon the beauties of Nature which, he said, ever present themselves to the eye of an artist; albeit he should be compelled to seek them, as now, in the simple elements of a stormy sky and troubled water. Dull though this style of entertainment might be, it sufficed to give a cue to pleasanter ideas than those it served to put aside. Raven hinted that Fabian was a capital singer, which he at once denied, making fifty excuses, which were as quickly objected to.

"I know he had a voice," said Raven, "and it will be your fault (addressing the ladies) if you do not make him find it."

"After proving himself such an accomplished sailor, I am sure he must be able to sing," said Lady Fitzjohn.

"If logic could make a fellow chirp, he ought to tune up now," observed Mr. Allan.

"Here's Miss Derisley," interposed Mr. Sigismond—thinking to serve two a good turn—"dying to hear you."

"She is not doing anything of the kind," muttered Belinda.

"How ought we to treat so obstinate a gentleman?" inquired Lady Derisley.

"*You* haven't asked him yet," whispered Mr. Harrod to Meriel.

"He doesn't wish to sing, I suppose," was her answer.

"Try him," said Harrod.

"Wont you sing?" asked Meriel, in a voice not audible half the length of the boat.

"I beg your pardon!" returned Fabian, interrogatively, jumping aft to catch her words.

"You are wanted to sing," repeated Miss Sigismond.

"What an ungracious way of framing the request," whispered Mr. Harrod, senior.

"I am afraid," said the vocalist, smiling and coloring, "it would be but a sorry performance if I attempted it."

Meriel sententiously replied that that remained to be proved.

A place being already cleared for him on the after part of the deck, there was no choice left Fabian but to sit down and comply. When his song was over, even Miss Belinda joined a feeble applause with the others. Far from the open air proving detrimental to the rich tones of his manly voice, it compelled him to exert it more than he would have trusted himself to do in a confined space; and so successful was the consequence that every

one sincerely declared that he had never sung a better song in his life.

"If I might venture to advise Miss Derisley!" exclaimed old Mr. Sigismond, when Fabian had returned to his post, "she should insist upon her future husband cultivating that fine voice of his; it is really a beautiful tenor, which a little knowledge of the art would teach him to manage to perfection."

"He prefers every body's playing to mine," murmured Belinda, with a sidelong glance at Miss Sigismond. "I have constantly offered to accompany him, but I know it bores him."

"He may think it bores you, my dear Bel," suggested Miss Sigismond.

"True," said Belinda, with a slight sneer. "It never occurred to me before, how considerate he might be."

"My dear Belinda," said Mr. Harrod, soothingly, "it was only yesterday he regretted to me that you cared so little for music."

"Ah!" sighed Mr. Sigismond, "lovers will

have their quarrels; there's such a pleasure in finding out they've both been mistaken."

"That is as happens," said Allan; "sometimes, I take it, the discovery is deuced unpleasant."

Belinda looked in the direction of her brother, who occupied the intervals between his remarks, by manifesting his admiration for Miss Sigismond, and said, "I could imagine such a case."

"But I," said he "could name one, so there I have the pull of you."

"I wish," said Raven, exchanging glances with Meriel, while he spoke to Allan, "you would take a pull at this rudder—my arms ache—and I see by the water yonder there'll be plenty of work for 'em before long."

Indeed the truth of this prediction was gradually forcing itself upon the observation of the whole party; nor was it alone to spare Miss Sigismond that Raven proposed for a few minutes a change of places with Allan Derisley. His arms really did ache; and he

wished at the same time he relieved Miss Sigismond of an annoyance that she bore with the greatest patience, to prepare himself, by a short rest, for the squall, which his knowledge of these waters convinced him they were shortly to be in the midst of. Fabian, too, increased the alarm which his friend's words had excited. He hailed Raven from the bow to resume the tiller, "for," cried he, "we're in for a blow, and Allan must lend a hand to shorten sail." His caution did not come too early; Allan had scarcely got back to the steerage, where all now lay ensconced under cloaks and plaids, or whatever covering they could lay hands on, when such a sudden gust bore down upon them, that the little vessel careened over till a good piece of her deck was clean under water. Raven fearing nothing more than the fright of his passengers, desired them all, in the tones of one accustomed to be obeyed, to sit over on the weather-side, and for their lives not to stir a limb. A couple

of reefs had already been taken in the main-sail. Fabian now hauled down the jib, and the peak being lowered a foot or two the gallant "Pomme," released from the press of canvass, again righted herself, and bore steadily onward upon her homeward course. The distance yet to be run was about a mile; but in consequence of a bed of sunken rocks known to be somewhere in the direct line between the bay they had just left and the Wyldeacre landing, Raven was obliged to steer across for the opposite shore.

The storminess of the evening, together with a dense mist, which thickened every minute, anticipated the usual hour of darkness; the women lay huddled together, undergoing the double inconvenience of fear and discomfort; of the men, Allan, who was no coward, fared the best; for consulting no person's feelings but his own he had secured more than his share of covering, and lay snug enough under the lee of Mr. Harrod, puffing the fumes of his lighted pipe

full in the face of his neighbors. Harrod himself neither shared the indifference of Mr. Derisley, nor even bore his lot with the resignation of Mr. Sigismond. But so distressing were his terrors that he could not rest quiet in one of the many postures which he successively assumed in a minute; still the mist thickened, or rather changed into a fine rain, through which it was impossible to see a yard. The waves, too, rose with the wind, and almost at every plunge the boat took in "a sea," if fresh water waves may be so called, that washed right over the combing to drench the affrighted nestlers through cloaks, tarpaulins, and every bit of covering they had on; occasionally Raven shouted to Fabian to keep a sharp look out for land; but not a yard ahead could any eye have pierced the fog. Both agreed it was time to put the helm down, and run over; both, too, expected they had calculated the length of this tack to such a nicety that the next would bring them

within a few yards of their proper landing. But the words "Helm alee!" were not out of Raven's mouth when a violent shock threw Fabian on his back, and the women's screams, and crashing of timbers, announced the fact that the "Pomme" had run full tilt upon a rock.

Raven, never more calm than when in real difficulty, instantly left the helm, and letting fly the sheets, with Fabian's aid brailed up the mainsail, which banged about in the gale with a noise like claps of thunder. This done he jumped below, where a hasty examination soon informed him that the boat hung upon the rock which pierced her planks, and which, while it stopped the hole it made, would also prevent the water from pouring in. His fear was lest the wind should dash her to pieces where she lay, yet to get her off was hopeless, while freighted with a heavy cargo. Besides, when moved, she would probably fill ere he could stop the leak which, under any circumstances, would have been difficult to get at.

Having tried the depth of water alongside, he discovered that it scarcely exceeded five feet; and now, for the first time, he turned to the wretched Mr. Harrod who, with Lady Derisley and her daughter, had done their best throughout to bewilder him with senseless applications. "The water is not deep," he answered; "we will carry the ladies on shore." So saying, he and Fabian both jumped out, and, resting, their hands on each other's shoulders, received Lady Derisley upon a sort of seat thus constructed, and waded from the boat to where the shallowness of the lake taught them to seek dry land. Allan next offered to carry Meriel by himself; she scorned his proposition, but insisted on her father helping to rescue Lady Fitzjohn, who was lighter than Miss Derisley.

The beach, as it turned out, was nearly a hundred yards from the rock. This distance took the waders some minutes to perform. But after depositing their burdens in safety, the

most active returned for another load. Meriel demurred about going before her friend. She was younger, she said—in short she hesitated, and Belinda did not. As Miss Derisley joined the others, Mr. Sigismond's look of disappointment did not pass unnoticed by Raven. The old man had no strength to help them again; but he returned with Fabian to see his treasure brought from the wreck. About halfway between boat and land it so happened that for a short space the mist rolled up with a sudden gust of unwonted force. For the one minute of clearance the boat, before invisible, appeared distinctly to the eyes of the three who now approached her. Who shall paint their terror? Raven alone knew how to account for what they saw. The whole cargo lifted from the vessel, she had gradually floated from her position; turned in another direction, the wind had caught the sails, and tearing them open in spite of the brails, which had

not been fastened, she was bearing rapidly away before the full vigour of the gale.

When Mr. Sigismond caught sight of Meriel as she stood holding to the ropes with one hand, and waving a last farewell with the other, "My child! my child!" he wildly cried. "O God! who shall save my child!"

Although Raven could not swim he pressed forward, till, floundering out of his depth, he was compelled to relinquish his attempt to save her. Meanwhile Fabian had slipped off his coat and shoes, and, being an excellent swimmer, pursued the flying boat with strokes of matchless energy. He knew the vessel's course must be determined by the wind; and as the white foam left in the "Pomme's" wake convinced him he was close upon her, his endurance never flagged until the dark outline of the boat's sails loomed through the haze before him. This sight gave fresh vigour to his limbs, and soon he approached so near

as to perceive that the gunwale of the wreck was almost on a level with the water's edge; she had then filled. The question was, would she sink before he could overtake her? This thought made him gasp with apprehension; yet, despite the circumstance of her speed being materially retarded by her depth, his exertions had been, up till now, so much beyond his power, that do what he would he could not shorten the distance between them. Call aloud he dared not, for he had not a breath to throw away. On they went, pursuer and pursued; it was a dreadful chace, for to both death seemed every moment to grow more inevitable.

Now, reader, I must ask if ever you swam a longer distance than you could well get over? Did you ever know what it is to fight against an element that gains a mastery over you as you with every effort necessarily lose strength to combat with it? Have you experienced in such a plight the appalling con-

viction that the little power you had left could at most last but a few minutes longer? at the end of which period—unless some aid came that you *knew* could not come, unless by miracle—the cold, suffocating, unconscious waters would as surely close over your living head as they would close over a sinking stone. You reflecting the while, they *must* obey their laws; reflecting you were born to die, and why not now? by no other death than millions had died before you? Then hope withers—then comes paralysing despair—then fierce maddened struggles which exhaust the sooner—then a gulp of water—the lungs are choked with a single drop—then the broken hearted agony of death in life—the closing eyes, and the last thought here, "My hour is come. God have mercy on my soul!"

It was very near to this that Fabian came. But love is mighty, and, pushed to the last extremity, his thoughts still were, "Could he save her?" And what did Meriel feel in such

an hour? Did she know her lover was so near her? Yes! she knew it. She stood up upon the deck; she saw the drowning man—for he was very close—she heard him buffetting with the water; she heard him spitting it from his breathless mouth; she strained her senses to take leave of him for ever, for the boat carried her away, and he lagged more and more behind. Presently she could see no more; her eyes were too full of tears; it was too dark. Her ears refused to hear; the rain and storm deluged all; she sank upon her knees, and prayed for Fabian and herself. How she clasped her hands; how motionless her lips were; but her heart—her spirit—throbbed with passionate supplication to Him who has the power to save. Oh! who can tell the efficacy of heart-wrung prayers like those, when they who breathe them feel heaven cannot withstand their fervency? To hers it seemed heaven did vouchsafe an answer. It came like inspiration; the sudden thought

that she could stop the boat. It was short work then to loose the ropes which kept the sails up. Down fell the yard, and the boat, so deep, so little exposed to the wind, went on so slowly, that even Fabian's feeble struggles brought him to its side. Both thanked heaven devoutly as they knelt upon the deck; and, after this, as silently they thanked each other, Meriel's hand remained in Fabian's, where she herself had placed it, until he devoutly kissed it; and when he had done so the burning thoughts of years were branded into both their hearts, never more to be effaced.

The first word he spoke was to bid her mind the helm while he hoisted the sail half-mast. He told her he saw now the boat was water-logged, and could therefore sink no deeper. The promise of safety was, however, quite unneeded. Her mind was perfectly calm. Fabian was there. God would provide for the rest, as he had provided for them

until now. When the sail was up he took the rudder from her, till by-and-by the keel grated on the beach, and they got safe to land.

But Raven's house was not yet reached. Before they got there they had far to go, and ill to fare. Which side of the landing they were on was somewhat hard to tell. They ascertained there was a morass to cross, and the night was black as the mud through which they had to flounder. Poor Meriel! she would have given in, and lain down to perish in that swampy wilderness, where only bitterns habited, if Fabian had been just then at the bottom of the lake; and what would he have done without Meriel? both these thoughts were her's. When they came at last off the morass on to the road, its new-broke flints cut Fabian's bare feet to shreds, and thereby caused feelings of pain to his companion which were even greater than those which he himself suffered. He had no handker-

chief, for his coat was left behind, so she gave him her's for one foot, and something from her neck for another. But these flimsy things were worthless sandals to walk upon sharp flints with; therefore, ere he could stop her she tore large pieces from her plaid, which in fine she herself tied on, for he either wittingly or otherwise fumbled till she was forced to help him. From this until they reached the house, she would have him lean upon her arm. And when Fabian remembered these little things, as he did times out of mind afterwards; when he remembered what Meriel was to him that dreadful night; how the very tones of her voice were tenderer than ever mere pity could make them; and compared these remembrances with the proud, reserved, tantalizing, and saucy little creature which Meriel appeared to be in every-day life; he thought—I daresay you, good reader, have done so often—"What queer creatures these women are!" But did not

make the reflection, which I dare also say is your's, that Nature is more inexorable than art.

The surprise of Raven's housekeeper almost equalled her joy when the forlorn remnant of the pleasure party returned, especially as these brought tidings of her master's safety. She painted a woful picture of her distress, and told how she had despatched Davy with a pine torch an hour ago to the head of the lake, but never expected to see any soul of them again. Here she shed a few tears in consideration of misfortunes which might have befallen herself. But seeing how wet Meriel was, she began to bestir herself on the behalf of others. She now declared Miss Sigismond would catch her death if she stood reeking there in wet things; and, taking her out of Fabian's hearing, tried to persuade the girl to put on some of her enormous petticoats, &c. Meriel obstinately declined, and I verily believe would have run much greater

risks of catching her death, rather than have appeared before her present companion in the dress of the worthy but massive housekeeper. She, however, thanked Mrs. Dolphin for the generous offer, and desired her to order the carriage to the door without delay; for, she said, it might be half an hour before her father could get back—they had at least four miles to walk—in which time the carriage could almost take her home and return.

It may seem to some inconsistent with Meriel's unselfish nature to leave her parent to walk a long distance in a dark and rainy night; when his suspense, on her account, must have been intolerable. Why did she not rather send the carriage to meet him, and wait at Wyldeacre till he came? Her first thought was of him, and this was certainly her first intention. Why did she change it? Perhaps, my fair readers, you can guess, if others cannot. You can imagine a situation in which Meriel Sigismond and Fabian Harrod

might be placed, even more trying to the nerves, of one at least, than the terrors of a wreck at sea. You can imagine what in Fabian's manner made Meriel long for the housekeeper's return every moment the old woman stayed away about the carriage; and how impossible—yes, impossible (in her opinion)—it would be for them to remain together—alone—for heaven knew what length of time. The hour of danger and suffering was past now; but it had revealed strange secrets to both their hearts. It had revealed to each the double revelation of their own heart's secret, and the still more pregnant riddle of the sentiments of each towards the other. There needed no spoken words for such a purpose. The tongue is the least powerful of Love's interpreters; and this was the only one, Meriel perfectly well could see, which Fabian did not use when she and he were left together. But say you her tenderness in the wreck and afterwards, when more alone with him than now,

was unrestrained, and if she felt to him as she perceived he felt to her, why behave so differently? Fabian asked himself the question, for he could read her manner as easily as she read his thoughts. Was it mere woman's caprice? woman's coyishness? woman's timidity? he wondered. No! none of these—had he known Meriel better, he would have spared her the imputation of such frivolity. She acted from a sense of duty, more stringent in her eyes, at that moment, than the saving of her father from half an hour's wetting, or from twice that length of time's suspense. Her trepidation, her hurry to be gone was to spare her father, her lover, and herself, a greater pain than she inflicted. Fabian was engaged to Belinda. If he could not control his passion while this present temptation lasted, she, at all events, could remove temptation, and would command herself.

The usual elasticity of Fabian's spirit left

him, when, in a fleeting review, his prospects rose up before him. His engagement to Belinda being of an indefinite date, might have no definite period. It was, therefore, like an engagement to celibacy; but such a pledge became a thousand times less tolerable after the occurrences of the last few hours. These threw his spirit into rebellion against his father's wishes. What right had one to bind and fetter him? Besides, Belinda cared no more for him than he could ever care for her. Had not Meriel been the love of his life? If he could only be sure now of what he felt quite certain of when they were on the wreck, he would snap all his old bonds asunder, and bind himself anew with chains that he would woo to wear for ever. Mrs. Dolphin entered just as he reached this climax; had it been otherwise, it is possible, notwithstanding the stoutness of Meriel's resistance, that our story might have been told in one volume, instead of being, as now, prolonged to two. The housekeeper

waddled into the room to announce the carriage, bearing in her hands a tray, upon which was set the particular kind of cake she had so carefully provided for Miss Sigismond's luncheon.

"There!" she exclaimed, with a puff to relieve her exertions, as she placed the tray upon the table. "We didn't neglect you, Miss, though master was afraid *some* of the company would neglect him."

"We were rather late," returned Meriel, setting inuendos aside; "but you don't expect me to have my lunch now, do you, Dolphin?"

"What! not taste the cake!" exclaimed the astonished matron. "Well! if she was to inform master that Miss Meriel would not touch a morsel after all the fuss he had made about her tastes, she was sure he would be fit to do, she didn't know what."

"Really Dolphin," answered Meriel, "if

you persuade me I have been the cause of so much trouble, I shall never like to come to Wyldeacre again."

"Trouble, indeed!" quoth the officious dame. "Master would walk to America and back barefooted to please Miss Meriel, any day."

"Well!" said Meriel, "you must thank him from me, for as the carriage is up, I must be gone at once."

Fabian followed her to the door.

"I hope," said Meriel, "you will not have long to wait before the others come in."

"I shall follow you," he replied.

"How?" exclaimed Miss Sigismond, thinking of his wounded feet, and of the vacant seats in her carriage.

"I have a horse," he answered, partly to her relief and partly (she was a woman) to her disappointment.

"Good night," she said, as he squeezed her hand, "I owe you much—very much for this night's debt—more than I can ever repay you."

As she spoke the last sentence her voice slightly faltered, and the pressure of the hand with which it was accompanied, left a sensation in his own which is equally hard to be described or forgotten.

CHAPTER XI.

"You'll have over much of that 'bacco, old woman, presently, if you don't mind what you're after!" said Isaac Sandford to his mother, who was coughing till the blood-vessels in her head and neck swelled almost to bursting.

"Ugh! ugh! ugh!" strained the old beldam as the tears streamed from her bleared eyes. "God ha' mercy! ugh! I shall not—ugh! ugh! die, but live."

"I wouldn't advise you to chant that verse too securely," said the son, with a horse chuckle.

"Tush! boy! there's others wanted afore old Molly. He shall smite the heathens and de-

liver their beauties, ha! ha!—their beauties into the enemies' hands. Where's Mark?" whispered the hag, bending forward to catch the answer.

"Digging taters."

"I wish he had Jack's sperit; we shouldn't have such a job to keep Jack out o' sight, should us?"

"Mark's a fool! he's too soft by half!"

"D'ye think he'd blab if we tell'd un Jack had 'scaped from the convicts, and was kept stowed i' the Priory cave?"

"Like enough he would; you see he's so confoundedly pious there's no trusting of him."

"If Jack's time was up 'twould be a good job wouldn't it? He might give his evidence then agin Harrod. — We'd work this lot another way. Ye see," continued Mother Sandford, her son not responding, "'twas well knowed it were bekase he see this un shoot old Harrod—all the folks round knowed that was the reason — why

this here devil worked so to get him sent off,—for Jack wern't, so to say, a regular poacher, he didn't kill more game 'an we wanted. 'Tweren't as if he killed for the market, was it? But Harrod hired chaps to swear he was always poaching.—The lying thieves! they'll burn for it, and he too, I'll warrant un."

"What's all that about, mother?" said Mark, who entered from the garden to slake his thirst with a draught of fresh water. "Who are lying thieves mother? These are strongish words, and bad ones to make use of, whosoever deserves them."

"When my heart is vexed I will complain," retorted the crone. "If you was your father's son, boy, you'd learn to hate them that ruined your father's children. But the children of Ephraim turned themselves back in the day of battle,—mumble, mumble."

"We should learn to love our enemies, not to hate them, mother."

"They wouldn't be much enemies if we didn't hate 'em, would they Isaac?"

"No mother," Mark answered for his brother, "you're right. They'd soon be our friends if we treated 'em as such."

"That's all you know about it," said Isaac. "I suppose Harrod, now, would be tremendous friendly, if he knowed you'd forgiv'd him for transporting Jack, and dishonoring a respectable family. He's so terrible forgivin', he is."

"Well, I hope he might. But if he didn't others might."

"It aint no business of ourn if they chooses to go to everlasting punishment, are it?" said Mrs. Sandford, timidly. She seldom spoke a word, excepting as now, to support her husband's views.

"I wish," continued Mark, "you weren't always speaking of Mr. Harrod as though you would do him a mischief if you could."

"So I would, precious quick," growled the

brother, "if I had the chance,—and t'others too."

"What others, Isaac?"

"What others? Why them as passed sentence on Jack that should ha' sentence passed on themselves, for a pack o' liars and murderers, as they are."

"You surely can't mean Mr. Sigismond!"

"Don't I though? Wasn't he the magistrate who tried Jack? If it hadn't been for Sigismond, Jack would have got off. I was in court, and so were you, and you know Mark, as well as me, it was along of that old fool Jack's business was clinched.—But I'll clinch some of 'em yet."

"Wengeance is the Lord's," cried Molly, "and wengeance is sweet."

"I wish mother you would not put such constructions on the language of Scripture as you are in the habit of doing. As for Mr. Sigismond, Isaac, what he did I'll be bound for it he thought right. There's not a more

straightforward, kinder-hearted gentleman in the country. If he acted any ways wrong, it was in listening over much to Mr. Harrod. That brother Jack was innocent I have no manner of doubt. But perhaps Mr. Harrod thought Jack suspected him of shooting his uncle purposely. Jack did suspect that I know, though he might have been mistaken, —the best of us are at times. And if Mr. Harrod really took Jack for a poacher, why his fears about Jack's suspicions were sure to make him anxious to get him out of the way."

"Yes! but old Sigismond had no reason for being so d—d hard upon us."

"What could he do? Mr. Harrod couldn't act as magistrate where the man tried was accused by himself. The case therefore stood in course before Mr. Sigismond. When you think what evidence they brought together, I don't wonder any one who did'nt know Jack believed him guilty."

"Didn't Sigismond know him?" said the

old woman. "Didn't his family know our family ever so long? Han't we served un from generation to generation? and wasn't the old man behoven to us more 'an to send a son of mine to Botany Bay?"

"The more he was behoven to us, mother, the more hard was it for him to do his duty. Poor old man! he almost cried when he convicted Jack. I'm sure it cost Mr. Sigismond as much to pass that sentence as it did us to hear it, and, considering what he has done for the family first and last, since then, he deserves no ill-will, but quite the contrary, from any of us."

"Well! well!" said Molly, in a consolatory tone, "He visits the sins of the fathers on the children. There's many things mun come to pass yet. I tell'd Meriel the tale of the Prior's curse. I see she didn't want to hear un, but I tell'd un all the more for that. I'd liked for her to have heerd the end of the curse, but some'at stopped me—I forgets what

now though; my memory aint so fresh as it have been. I'm poured out like water now. The Lord help old Molly! But my praise is allust of Thee in the great congregation—leastwise it used to be, when I warn't too much of a cripple to get there, though Pilgrim's only a psalm-singing hypocrite, he ben't. But the Lord wont put that to my account—mumble, mumble. I don't forget the Prior's curse, though. Meriel knows the curse as well as I do, for all she didn't want to hear it.—'*Your children and your children's children shall die untimely deaths; one only shall be spared to bring down the curse—and never shall the curse depart until the parent of its last victim shall hang and rot upon a gibbet.*'" Having delivered herself of these terrible sentences, she lit her pipe, and sucked her withered cheeks into the hollows of her toothless gums as if she had been sucking the hearts' blood of the Harrods and the Sigismonds. When the language of malice was silent, Mark

looked sadly from his mother to Isaac, and went up to his labour at the Hall garden. Preaching morality to either he well knew to be a fruitless work. Quiet remonstrance, united to the effect of his own good example, was, he wisely judged, the best method of keeping their bad dispositions in check. He saw how malignantly they both cherished the recollection of his transported brother's wrongs; and he lived in constant dread lest they should inflame their hatred until it found gratification in some act of secret revenge. His good sense told him that the moderation of his own conduct alone could, and did, as he fancied, preserve to him a share in their confidence. And although in this he was mistaken, as we have just seen, with them, the continual presence of good had, as it must ever have with all, a secret influence which counteracted the overt potency of their evil intentions.

In the case of Molly and her son, the influ-

ence we speak of was unfortunately derived more from fear than admiration of Mark's virtues; so that when Mark was out of the way, they naturally dismissed rather than dwelt upon the recollection of him. He had scarcely gone a hundred yards from the cottage when the remaining couple fell-to abusing not only the Harrods and Sigismonds, but likewise Mark himself. The language which they deemed unfit for his ears, we shall certainly not inflict on any one elses.

Possibly the gist of the foregoing conversation, that part at least relating to Mr. Harrod, has somewhat confused the reader. A few outlines of this gentleman's life will soon explain the circumstances to which Molly and her son so sinisterly alluded. They will also elucidate Mr. Harrod's motives for allying himself by marriage to the family of the Derisleys.

For some generations past the Harrods had possessed a thousand acres or so of freehold

in the parish of D——. By constant contrivance, and by personal merit, the last possessor, (our Mr. Harrod's uncle) had raised his position from that enjoyed by his ancestors, as respected yeomen, to the grade of esquire, and justice of the peace. This esquire lived and died a bachelor. Most of his relatives were in humbler stations of life than himself, and, notwithstanding the generous way in which he supplied them from his purse—the basis whereon his gentility rested was in his judgment not adequately solid to permit of too noticeable a familiarity with a kindred of whom he was by no means proud.

One alone of his relations found favor in his eyes; this one was his nephew. But besides instilling into his brother's son the maxims by which his own elevation had been achieved, Mr. Harrod (the uncle) showed no particular interest in the youth destined to succeed him. The world supposed the old bachelor had adopted as his heir a son of Lord Mountseer's, since

for the boy he professed the warmest affection. When at Granstein, he was treated with extra hospitality; no attention could possibly be thrown away upon one who undoubtedly intended to leave a young Granstein a compact estate worth two or three thousand *per annum*.

Mr. Harrod (the last) did not consider it worth his while to destroy so pleasing an illusion. Sagacious ones used to hint that the old bachelor was a sly ambitious man, and that the Mountseers were over sanguine. But as this virtuous and noble family held with the poet, "Et genus et virtus, nisi cum re, vilior alga est," which, freely translated, might mean that "mere birth is more contemptible than sea-weed, and virtue consists in the possession of riches," they were content to lavish their condescension in expectance of an equivalent, while the cunning yeoman borrowed importance from the ancient respectability of the Mountseers, at the cost of an occasional tip to the son. When the

settling day came—upon Mr. Harrod's demise—the noble family were out of heart and out of pocket. The *quid pro quo* was not quite commensurate to their expectations.

The old man's death was sudden. He fell by the accidental discharge of his nephew's gun, while they were partridge-shooting together on his own land. At the opening of his will people opened their eyes to find the man by whose hand he had been deprived of life left heir to his entire fortune and estates. Never backward in surmising possibilities, usually as unfavorable as can be conceived for the credit of those whom they concern, the world at once whispered the accident did not appear so purely accidental as could be wished. Yet, all things taken into consideration, the grounds of suspicion were very slight. There was little likelihood the deceased should have acquainted his nephew with an intention which, once rumoured, would have cost him the friendship of the

noble house whose intimacy went further perhaps to establish his position than any pretence he had to actual consequence.

He had, moreover, survived the accident for some days, during which time his lawyer had been with him, for the purpose, as it afterwards appeared, of making some trifling alterations in his will. If, as the nephew's friends remarked, Mr. Harrod himself had imagined ill of his successor, assuredly he would have left his money elsewhere, even could he have forborne to hint at that person's guilt. But the fact of the inheritor's friends finding themselves called upon to offer arguments in his defence, is in itself sufficient proof that the heir was suspected by his enemies. In short, Opinion — whom some wise man has proclaimed to be the Queen of the World—got at last to rule the neighbourhood with a sway so prejudicial to the surviving Mr. Harrod's tastes, that he found the uncharitableness of the county surpass the

endurance of his Christian fortitude, and for several years relinquished his country seat, and spent its proceeds in the less fastidious circles of our modern Babylon.

About ten years before his first introduction to the reader, and about seven from the day of his succession, Mr. Harrod returned to Darsingham. The interval of his absence was long enough to blunt the sharpness of calumny—the pleasures of which depend a good deal upon novelty. He resumed his duties on the bench, and wielded his commission with unflinching austerity. But a very little experience taught him that any attempt to imitate the example of his predecessors by applying the principal family in the county to his own aggrandisement would be a waste of time and labor. He had still a *status* to establish—still a blemished reputation to repair: both these ends he purposed to effect through the assistance of his nearest neighbours. And the Derisleys, if not the

first, were, at all events, the second, important family in the county.

Mr. Harrod made an artistic survey of Carrol and its inmates. The apparently phlegmatic and obviously handsome sybarite, he at once marked out as the *pointe d'appui* of his future tactics. Her seeming indifference did not pass with him for unconcern. He sounded her character, and one flash of her eye swept away the illusion of her immutable apathy.

Appearances are so deceptive that, were we always carried away by them, I vow it would be difficult to put one's finger on an innocent person. A maxim of Des Cartes says, "Whatever admits of a doubt cannot be received as true." Precisely the opposite doctrine seems to be practised by those who gratuitously pass judgment on their fellow beings. With them the maxim is, "Whatever appears to be true cannot admit of a doubt." Still, the former axiom, though

originally adopted in a less orthodox spirit, seems, on the whole, most in accordance with those holy instructions which teach us not to judge one another at all. After these reflections, therefore, we forbear to raise conjectures upon the means by which Mr. Harrod obtained his influence over Lady Derisley. An influence, however, he did obtain, and of its irresistible nature the acute reader must have observed indications from the first moment they appeared on the scene together.

The subjugation of her ladyship's husband was an affair of greater ease. Testy, crabbed, selfish, Sir Foy expected everything of everybody. None, therefore, stirred limb for him oftener than obliged. In this helpless and pitiable state, attention was so great a contrast to neglect that Harrod readily made his presence indispensable. Incompetent to conduct the management of his own estates, the baronet committed his affairs, with great self-gratulation, to the control of his able friend.

He offered this worthy coadjutor a thousand a-year to audit his accounts; but the offer was declined with the warmest assurances of disinterested regard. Not a farm-building underwent repair without Mr. Harrod's assent. The bailiff, selected for the office by Mr. Harrod himself, swore by the discretion of Sir Foy's best friend. Defaulting tenants, whom the little baronet—wrathful as he was—had not pluck to face, trembled before the inexorable auditor. In ten years, Sir Foy's estates rose twenty per cent. in value, and at last the baronet was astounded at the enormous credit which stood to his account.

But the disposal of Sir Foy's wealth had now become the most important feature in Mr. Harrod's schemes, and the rich man was delighted to be relieved of an onerous responsibility. In the natural course of things, the heir of Carrol might have interfered with Harrod's plans. Fortunately for the success of these, Mr. Allan Derisley

evinced an early taste for the society of grooms, horses, betting people, &c., and this taste—though excessively fashionable, and so far as I know (except by hearsay) perfectly honourable—afforded our conspirator a convenient lever for ousting Mr. Derisley from his father's good graces. The baronet listened with alarm to the warning voice which foretold bankruptcy as the penalty attached to his son's control of the exchequer. Already he saw his park converted into a training ground, his grooms transformed into pigmies, his substance consumed by blacklegs, and himself compelled to wear cut away coats—too happy if he could keep his gouty legs out of trousers cut to that fashion which preserves with fondness the association of a bandage. Mr. Allan remained in blissful ignorance of the good turn he owed to Mr. Harrod; and while he continued to find plenty of friends of the Hebrew persuasion prompt to supply him with the means of indulging his predilections, he never troubled

his head to contend with his father, nor quarrelled with Harrod for sparing his indolence the trouble of managing estates shortly, as he thought, to become his own. Mr. Harrod watched with infinite composure the embarrassment of Allan's share of the Carrol property. Meanwhile, he took every precaution to settle the other portion on Miss Derisley, whose hand, thus richly endowed, he destined for his own son. Here was the summit of his designs. Connected by this intimate tie to a family of unexceptionable position—his son's wife possessed of fortune enough to purchase a fair estate, and the possibility of a reversion of the whole Carrol property in favor of his daughter-in-law—who would impugn his respectability, or turn with insolent frigidity upon him who had once been treated as a suspected adventurer?

CHAPTER XII.

Between Raven and Meriel Sigismond—it is time we spoke of these two—the closest intimacy had existed for many years. Her friendship for him was of a higher order perhaps than she felt for any other acquaintance; Mr. Harrod she liked because she took his part against accusers—and believed moreover in the affection he professed for herself; Lady Fitzjohn being faultless in Meriel's eyes, was loved as a matter of course. But Raven occupied a more exalted position in her regard than either of these or of any others whom we have not spoken of:—his sincerity she was sure equalled Harrod's, his tenderness, formerly, had not been surpassed by Lady

Fitzjohn's. Miss Sigismond's earliest recollections of Raven placed him in a more favorable light than any other of her parents' friends. What though "Goody" brought her presents, Raven's were better; they evidently cost more than Lady Fitzjohn's; and children are strangely discriminating. If Goody told her fairy tales, they were pretty tales, yet, had she not read them for herself out of the books Raven gave her? His stories were of real princes and princesses—of fairies whom she was disappointed not to meet in the woods every evening—of wonderful adventures of his own—of battles, shipwrecks, &c., and all of them quite, quite true. When Goody romped with her, the child saw that Goody was only playing a very moderate child's part. When Raven joined her games, what pleased her most, was to see how intensely pleased he truly was himself.

For some years she had seen nothing, scarcely heard of this friend. When he came

back, she had outgrown Goody and spelling books, and was fast wearing out a whole suit of governesses. Of all matrons Goody was the worst at engaging a governess. Any governess who could manage a child, though no match for a girl in her teens, might, if she possessed the least perception, insist, in five minutes, on Goody engaging her. And when after the first week it was discovered that this virago, who had tyrannized over Lady Fitzjohn, was constantly being locked up in the school-room by Miss Meriel; however important it then became that the governess should leave, half a year generally slipped away ere the poor little matron could harden her heart, or screw up sufficient courage to dismiss her. By the time Raven returned, both old Sigismond and Lady Fitzjohn were at their wits ends to moderate the spirits and control the romping tricks of the child. Of Raven's interference Mr. Sigismond was extremely jealous—yet he could not help ob-

serving that after the return of this gentleman a vast amelioration soon manifested itself in Meriel's general conduct; just with the same success with which he had told his fairy tales before he told her what instructed now; she learnt more from him in an afternoon stroll, than Goody, the governess, and old Sigismond could teach her in six months. Full well she understood this, and took pleasure in Raven's society even for the advantage she derived from it; for, light of heart and wild spirited as she was, she possessed an astonishing share of sense, and had more ambition than any of her belongings suspected. Indeed from about the time she was sixteen years old, she continued to take more and more pains with herself; and so assiduous was she in this work of improvement, that ere long she had completely subdued most of her little failings, and by degrees succeeded in adorning her mind and character with as many charms as nature had lavished upon her person. Lady Fitzjohn, like

Mr. Sigismond, perceived the useful influence which Raven exerted over the sweet creature whom she doted upon, and sometimes fancied the relationship might thereafter become of a still more intimate and more sacred nature.

The reader who now knows the secrets of Miss Meriel's heart, may judge how completely the good little woman was in error. Yet her esteem and affection for Raven ripened with each year of their friendship. As she grew to woman's estate, and saw more of the world, she better understood how to account for the preference she had ever given to him. In the comparison she made between him and others, she found him, (so she thought), bolder, larger hearted, more intelligent, profound, original, and more honest, earnest, and sincere, than the rest. Then too she liked him better, because she understood him less than many others. She was interested about him. He was occasionally vague in his conversation, averse to speaking of himself, she never could

gather from him the history of his life. When she asked why he lived alone, and did not marry? he gave her the answer Socrates made to the same question, "Whether a man should choose a wife or not he would repent it." Then his opinions on religion puzzled her. When any person was censured for this or that obliquity—a common enough occurrence—Raven merely smiled. If the name of some heretic was mentioned, he did not observe the customary homage which devout people pay religion.—He neither groaned nor sighed, nor shook his head, nor raised his eyes towards the ceiling. In controversial disputes he never could be got to take part—and although Meriel would not believe it of him, (his conduct, she thought, was more christian-like than those who did so), many averred he was an Atheist. Once she put the question to him, "Was he one or not?" Strange to relate he merely smiled as usual, and answered "No." "This calmness," Meriel would say to herself,

"does not come of indifference to these subjects, nor from natural apathy. By nature he is an enthusiast—but he controls himself with a rod of iron. He is full of sensibility and affection. Yet why does he not marry? why live in that dreary place?—alone, too!—I would give worlds to steal his secret, and to learn to be a more useful friend to him!"

One day, not very long after the adventure on the lake at Wyldeacre, she was walking across the meadows on her way to the village, when Raven met her. She was a little startled at seeing him, for at the moment he was not the immediate object of her reflections. Perhaps Raven guessed as much, and may be the slight blush which his sudden appearance elicited helped him to guess even more. We subjoin some of the conversation which passed between them—not that it gives a very tangible clue to his surmises, whatever they might have been—for he was in a most determined fit of vagueness—but that it may serve to instance

his manner with Meriel, and, what is of greater importance, lead to the particular consequence which Meriel was turning in her mind as she sauntered through the fields. No matter how the dialogue commenced.—

"I wish" replied Meriel to Raven's last sentence, "you would try to remember that I have but one complete set of senses. You stare at vacancy, and mutter what may be comprehensible to the winds.—To me the milky way is not more nebulous than you are obscure. Yes, you stare, but 'tis quite true."

"See here" said Raven, stooping to turn over a large stone, and speaking as though without reference to her rebuke, "how pale and feeble the herbage is in that spot. How these attenuated blades have crawled under the crushing weight to get out and up at the edges."

"Well?"

"But yon fierce rays will riddle those heavy clouds by-and-bye."

"And then?"

"The same tale is told to the highest ends of this world's creation. Poet, orator, painter, sculptor, acknowledge the universal law. The end of Art is to fulfil the peremptory decrees of Nature, the strong heave off the crushing rock,—make darkness light, and so assert their aim; the weak pine and struggle as these grass blades do, to obey the majesty of their instinct, but perish because too powerless to obey it. And yet you blame me Meriel, because I find *utterance* a difficulty."

"If your thoughts were simpler, simple words would suit them, and both would better suit a simple listener."

"Are you such a one?"

"Unless I talk and listen too; but now I want to listen only."

"To what?"

"To what you'll please to tell me."

"Of?"

"Of yourself, most certainly!"

"If I speak not already enough on that score, I am surprised."

"How so?"

"Since there is nothing I love and hate so constantly."

"Strange constancy—loving and hating in a breath."

"There is no better in the best of us."

"Come," said Meriel, taking Raven's hand and leading him to the banks of a clear stream which meandered through the field they walked in. You told me once to study botany that I might teach it you; there should be near this bend a valineria; see, there it grows, wending in mid stream with graceful restlessness. Upon the shallow beneath the further bank, you see another, fastened by a shorter stem. Each woos the other — an amorous pair—kept long asunder by cold-blooded Spring. Till summer comes these faithful Naiads shall strain their fretted heart-strings, but all in vain. At last this one shall shed his

blossoms, and leaving the gentle current to waft them to his mistress, he slowly pines and dies."

"Love is full of pretty fancies," mused Raven.

"Realities," suggested Meriel.

"Fancies—fancies!" returned the other, turning, almost fiercely, upon his companion, "aye fancies, I say, and the prettier the deadlier. Shall I tell you something of love which yet you have not dreamt of? Straining heart-strings, that will not crack, forsooth! Yes; the more love craves, the less can it command. The sweeter its hopes the bitterer its disappointments. Where most it confides in its own powers, there most it finds its impotency. Would you witness the most passionate grief—the most sullen despair—seek them in the lover's breast. Would you know where remorse—where hatred—where poisonous jealousy have deepest fixed their fangs—wherever fancy has misled the lover, go, seek them there! Unless it take Earth for

Earth its heavens are turned to hells—and if there be no such fancy, alas! there is no love. Orphans it begets to starve on winter's ice. Husbands and wives it rends apart as lightening rives bark from oak trees. Children it teaches to deceive, and then to curse their parents. And multitudes it goads to such excesses, that they will brave all misery hereafter, to escape from that they suffer here!"

"This is the portrait of a passion whose violence takes from it every claim to the gentle name of love," said Meriel. "True love craves not immoderately its own pleasure so much as it desires another's happiness. Its boast is not in its power to do, but in its patience to endure. All passion unrestrained must pay its penalty. But give not the sweet name of love to fierce, unconquered appetites. These make our nobler natures meaner than the poor brutes', whose instincts impel them blindly to a special aim, while men have souls to—"

"Make their passions fiendish!"

"But when you speak of vices—and to the hideous list you've read there needs no adding—take the pangs that owe their bitterness to crime, and add to these all other pangs that owe their keenness to our natural state. None are bearable without, all are mitigated by love."

Raven was about to reply, but he observed Lady Fitzjohn coming forward to meet them—so, pleading some business call, he left the ladies to their own pursuits.

"Well Merrie!" began the elder of the two, "has Mr. Raven been making himself agreeable?"

"Very, Goody. He is seldom otherwise."

"What did he talk about?"

"Clouds and water weeds."

"And what else, dear?"

"Well, I'm a little confused; I don't remember."

"Ahem!" coughed Goody, "Poor man! he is very unsettled, I think."

"Not more so than ever," said Meriel."

"No? I am surprised you should not remark it. But he certainly is altered since his return. I can't help thinking he has something on his mind."

"A good many somethings, I should say."

"Ah, but I suspect—indeed, between ourselves, Merrie, I feel pretty sure he has something particular on his mind. Did it never strike you that he might be in love."

"It never struck him, I think!"

"No? well, that's very odd! Didn't he talk about—that is, didn't he make any allusions to the subject while he walked with you?"

"About love? Oh yes, he said a great deal about it."

"Ah! come, I thought so; and what did he say, dear?"

"He said love was the greatest nonsense, the greatest mistake in the world."

"He surely did not?"

"He surely did, and meant it too."

"Men never say what they mean when they are in love themselves."

"That is exactly the argument he used."

"Yes, but he is such an honourable, truthful character."

"To be sure he is, and therefore thought as he spoke."

"Well, well, when you know the world as well as I do—"

"I shall see through milestones before they have a hole in them, eh Goody?"

"You'll see when a man is in love with you, my dear."

"In love with *me*—Raven in love with *me*! my darling Goody! why you must have been taking a nap in your arm-chair with your spectacles upside down!"

"Ah! say what you will; but I never saw

lovemaking if he is not; and depend upon it, my dear, that he's one in a thousand, and deserves all the regard you have for him—that's my opinion."

"Ha! ha! ha! Why you wouldn't have me marry Raven, would you, you silly little woman?"

"Why not, my dear? I should have thought he would have been the very man a girl would have fallen in love with. There's Belinda dying of love for him. Either of Lord Mountseer's daughters would give their ears for him; and I have known others worth the whole bunch of them that really did love him —that I have."

"This is so new an idea to me that I cannot help laughing at it."

"You may laugh, but wait till you are in love yourself, you will be more serious about it then."

"How do you know, Goody, I ever mean to fall in love? I am not at all sure that love is not mere fancy and folly, as Raven says."

"Well! you are young enough to learn the contrary. There is no hurry, and perhaps it is better you should be older before you lose your heart, for when once that is gone, good bye to all peace and happiness."

"Hum! You think then that I had better not fall in love Goody?"

"Well! if you are not disposed to encourage Mr. Raven, you need not think about love at present, dear, for there is nobody else I know who is worthy of you. Allan Derisley you do not like; Lord Granstein is an amiable and gentleman-like young man —but you say you have no fancy for him either."

"I hate Mr. Derisley!"

"Hush! you must not hate any body, Merrie!"

"Well then, I detest him! and I don't care a fig for Lord Granstein!"

"And since there are no other young men whom you'd possibly think of,—I say, my

dear, we need not trouble ourselves about love yet, need we?"

"Not unless love troubles us, certainly.—But, to change the subject—have you seen Belinda lately?"

"No. I hear she is going to Granstein soon."

"To Granstein! Then I suppose Mr. Harrod is asked there too?"

"Probably; though his father told me he had hardly recovered the effects of the boat wreck yet. Poor Fabian! I'm sure I shall be grateful to him all my life. But he ever was a nice boy, and I am glad to see he is grown up so gentlemanlike and good looking."

"Yes; he deserves great credit, especially for the latter."

"I am sure he would not be so handsome if he were not good too, and, certainly, he has the sweetest expression I ever saw."

"Really Goody you are quite eloquent upon the subject. I shall begin to think you have lost your heart soon."

"I wont say what might not have been the case had I been at your age, my dear; and if the thing had not been absolutely out of the question, perhaps Miss Meriel would scarcely have thought so indifferently of one who saved her life."

"Why, after all, no man with the smallest sense of gallantry could have left me to be drowned, without making some effort to save me; and as to my indifference, I ask you seriously, my dear Goody, can you conceive any circumstances under which I could ever have regarded such a person with anything but indifference?"

"Any circumstances! Why what does the girl expect? Such a person, indeed! Why if I was your own mother, Fabian Harrod is the very man I should have chosen for your husband, my dear."

"My darling Goody!" cried Meriel, turning about and suddenly embracing her astonished companion.—"With all my heart

then I wish you had been my mother. For to tell you a secret which has long tortured me, because I kept it from you," she whispered the rest in the little woman's ear, "I love him even more than you do."

"Love Fabian Harrod! You love Fabian Harrod? Impossible! But you are jesting with me, Meriel."

"Alas! dear Goody, it is too sadly true."

"My poor child.—Oh, but I intreat you to conquer this unfortunate affection. Dear, dear, what will your father say!"

"Goody! I have confided to you a secret that has been treasured in my inmost heart for a long—long time. Now listen to me, nobody is to be made unhappy by my misfortune, if it be a misfortune."

"Oh! it is most unfortunate."

"I do not deny it. But it need be unfortunate to none beside me, if no others but ourselves know it, and if we only think of it as a thing to be forgotten. I know perfectly

how utterly hopeless my love for him must be. But you must not charge me with either guilt or folly, in being now affected as I am. What I feel towards Fabian is the issue of all my past recollections.—As children, we were playmates. — He went to school, from thence he wrote me of every trifling incident, keeping alive in me a little sister's fondness. At college he had no friend more intimate than I, for still we always corresponded. He went abroad. Could two years make me heartless or unnatural? No! I loved him better, was prouder of his friendship when he returned. His accomplishments, his advancement, his improved exterior, were observed by me with such emotions as an only brother inspires an only sister with. But to his eyes perhaps our true relationship began to be revealed. He treated me no longer as a sister, no longer as a child, not that his manner had less of tenderness in it, but that it was more respectful. The superiority I had

acknowledged in him, he now first began to bow to in me, consulting my opinions where hitherto I had accepted his dictation. Endless were it dear Goody, to relate all the more trivial ways in which my heart caught from his the sweet malady which soon affected both. Enough for you to know is that I understood his meaning. And when he spoke with sorrow and aversion of the destiny his father had allotted to him—what needed I a plainer declaration of his true intent? From that time we never met without embarrassment. But the obstacles apparently insurmountable to a happy result, only served to inflame mine, and, as I fancied, his attachment. More than eighteen months he was absent in America—once only in that period he wrote me a letter which, for ought of secrecy that its contents enjoined, might have been published. What could this imply? a change? or might it be the purposed coldness of his duty? the question vexed me night and day. And when

on his return I found him—what he is—when I still saw how hateful to him was his engagement to Miss Derisley; could I banish all hope that some day he might be free. Then came that awful night; and from what passed afterwards, though I even then restrained my gratitude, lest it should give encouragement, I knew too well for my own peace of mind that his was in equal danger."

Miss Sigismond paused, and Lady Fitzjohn was too much perplexed to utter a sentence in rejoinder. Presently Meriel, seeing the other had no observation to make, went on to caution her friend to keep her secret if she would not be the means of making her very wretched. "Which ever way Providence shall direct it," she added, "that I must and will be prepared for."

"My dearest Meriel," replied Lady Fitzjohn, "you know you may trust me to do whatever you wish and think best. But before you dwell upon any chance I must tell you what I

fear will at once destroy hope. Even if Fabian were not engaged to Belinda, and wished to marry you, your father would never give his consent."

"Indeed! Why so?"

"From some cause or other—what, I have no conception of—Mr. Sigismond has lately expressed a dislike to Fabian. You know how strong his impressions are. He has always had an unconquerable repugnance to Mr. Harrod, and in addition to all this, unless Mr. Harrod himself consented to the match, as I have often told you my love, the fortune your father will give you would be far too small to admit of your marrying upon that alone."

"Surely if Mr. Harrod—who, in spite of all said against him is a good old gentleman—surely when he finds that Fabian is opposed to the marriage with Belinda, he will not be so cruel as to constrain him against his choice in what concerns the happiness of a life."

"Do not, I beg of you, prop yourself

with false hopes. You may depend on my doing anything in my power to serve your happiness, should a favorable moment arrive; but my conviction is that the only wise course is to dismiss Fabian from your mind. Dear! dear!" sobbed the little woman, when she could say no more, "how I wish this misfortune had never happened!" Nor was it long before Miss Sigismond followed the example of her tender-hearted friend. Blind as old Sigismond was, he remarked when Meriel came in that her eyes seemed very much inflamed; and considering the information she had unexpectedly obtained from her *confidante* it is not to be wondered at if she was extremely wretched for some time.

CHAPTER XIII.

Leaving Miss Sigismond to dry her tears, we must direct our attention towards her lover, in following the adventures of whom, we shall unavoidably be led to describe persons and scenes which possess but a comparatively trifling interest to those whose sympathy is, we trust, almost absorbed in the fortunes of poor Meriel. But when it is borne in mind that the living world is like an edifice of stupendous proportions, in which we move as little insects creep about some crevice of a mighty mansion, capable only of distinguishing bricks from mortar, and these at most from corner-stones; we must remark how still like the insects, impotent to comprehend

what these may be to the whole, and less—what to them—we are mixed up with persons whose relationship, or consequence to us, remains inscrutable, sometimes for long, sometimes for life; but who, the thoughtless only will suppose, step into our path without causing both us and themselves to deviate much or little for a worse or a better course.

By a natural coincidence it came to pass, that about the same hour in which Meriel was making her confession to Lady Fitzjohn, Fabian, in pursuance of the resolutions he had previously formed, was similarly engaged with his father.

Mr. Harrod's sympathy was naturally of a more manly, and some would call it more sensible character than Lady Fitzjohn's. With respect to sympathy Mr. Harrod took this view. There are two tests by which sympathy should be tried. First, by its effect upon self; it being the duty of every human being,

and one he religiously observes, to consider self before any other object in the world. Secondly and lastly, for that is the last thing that need trouble any one's head, how it affects other people. "Let no one," he would say, "encourage any kind of sympathy which will not stand these tests. For if the mind be so reduced by considerations for other people as to lose sight of its own interests, the object of sympathy is doubly frustrated. *Imprimis*, its owner derives no advantage from it whatever. Secondly, he can confer none, because where the calamities he would mitigate only make him a fellow-sufferer, the soundness of his judgment must be biassed by the weakness of his affection."

Fabian was not ignorant of his father's character, for notwithstanding the skilful way in which that gentleman deceived his neighbors, to do him justice he generally preferred dealing plainly with his own son. Prepared for relentless obstinacy, and a total rejection

on the part of his parent, yet unshaken in the resolve which warm passion had forced him into, Fabian chose the moment for avowing himself when his father and he were on their way to join the party at Carrol. Mr. Harrod was not surprised at what his son told him. But he was very much surprised, or pretended to be so, that his son should presume to tell it. With a young man of inferior understanding to Fabian, or of a less determined spirit, Harrod would have resorted to an outburst of temper. With Fabian he knew this would not serve his purpose, and since his intention was to carry his point he kept his temper, although it was a bad one. Having listened to the history of love, which was as near as can be, a paraphrase of Miss Sigismond's, with the exception of certain extravagant marks of admiration for her character and person, which were more appropriate in his mouth than similar ones would have been in hers, Mr. Harrod observed, that "all he

now heard might be perfectly true; but even if Miss Sigismond possessed such charms—for his part he thought her personal attractions had blinded Fabian to her real character—these were not the least worth considering, as his whole fortune, if he married her, would scarcely pay his tailor's bill."

Fabian replied that he knew he should be greatly dependent on his father's bounty, but trusted this would not be withheld from him, because he had not placed his affections where it was intended that he should."

To this Mr. Harrod very candidly replied, "That he had long made up his mind upon that subject; and not a penny should his son have from him if he married any one but Belinda Derisley. He had his own particular reasons for insisting on this match, and if Fabian chose to oppose his father's interests, to undo the whole labour, and thwart the scheme of his whole life by selfishly and stupidly giving way to a mere boyish whim, he must abide by the

consequence, and they certainly would be starvation."

"Then, sir," replied his son, with more spirit than prudence, "if my choice must be between wealth without Miss Sigismond, and poverty with her, I readily embrace the latter alternative."

"This my dear Fabian," said his father carelessly, "is of course your present decision, every young fellow who has his blood up about a pretty girl would make exactly the same choice. But if you had been married six months you would be as sensible of the folly of this as I am."

"Do you think then, sir, it would be possible to live a week with such a creature, and not grow more devoted to her every moment of one's existence? If you are so egregiously ignorant of her character, I no longer wonder you think me foolish. But I am amazed that you can have known her so long, and not have seen—"

"That she has a beautiful skin, a delicious

little figure, a piquant manner, and a perfect foot and ancle."

"Such an estimation of the motives of my admiration for Miss Sigismond does as little credit to yourself as to your son, sir."

"Pooh, pooh! boy. There's no harm in't. These charms had the same effect on me once, before I discovered that the fellest little devils in creation are often the daintiest morsels to look at; every young chap is the same—no blame. Six weeks in London or Paris, with a hundred pound in your pocket is the best cure for this infatuation."

"Well, sir, you will do as you please with your own, but do not deceive yourself with the notion that your decision, or any obstacle in the world, will lessen my devotion to its present object."

"Come, come! don't be a fool!" quoth the father, "you have plenty of brains; just reflect what the common sense view of the question is. You say you are in love, and

fancy you can never be happy, unless you marry this particular girl. In the whole course of our lives we never make so absurd a mistake as this. A whim—a mere whim, I say, so deludes a man in love, that he actually believes wealth, position, independence, power, are all to be despised for the sake of a toy; which at best can only amuse his idle hours, or gratify his transient appetites."

"I will not argue with you, sir," said Fabian, "our feelings on this subject are so discordant they cannot be attuned. I will only say this much, and it involves a meaning at once manly and divine, I love Meriel Sigismond, and while the breath is in my body, I will strive to make her mine."

"And as soon as you succeed, you'll cease to be my heir."

Throughout the foregoing dialogue, it will be observed that Mr. Harrod preserved great equanimity and good nature, and considering, as he himself remarked, all his interests,

and the scheme of his whole life were at stake, it is at first sight rather singular that he should have been so forbearing. There were, however, reasons for this—one we have stated—the firmness of Fabian's character; the other, his persuasion that the threat of disinheritance would weigh in proportion to its sincerity. It was in cases of this description that Mr. Harrod erred in judging others by himself. He literally had none of those delusions which he ascribed to lovers; and what is more, he never had had, for he was utterly incapable of experiencing any of those impulses which prefer generous sentiments and self-sacrificing devotion to the dictates of discretion and the cold wisdom of the world. He loved wealth—not to hoard it—he was no miser, but for the power and other amenities it conferred. Position he wanted, because being dissatisfied with his moral state, it was absolutely necessary he should have a good social one. In other words, not being on very good terms with his

own conscience, he deemed it prudent to be on the best he could with the devil; so excellent an appreciator himself of the advantages which he threatened to take from his son, he had scarcely a fear that that son—whose sense he had seen many proofs of—would be such a dolt as not to acknowledge their worth by his obedience in the end.

On the arrival of Mr. Harrod and Fabian at Carrol they found the same party as heretofore, with the addition only of Raven and Lord Granstein, eldest son of Lord Mountseer. This young nobleman, who was about the same age as Fabian, had studied together with him and Allan Derisley, under the tuition of Mr. Small. He was of a frank, ingenuous disposition, of a manly and dignified demeanor, and possessed a sufficiently well-favored person to please most women, many tailors, and all his valets.

During their pupillage his lordship and young Harrod entered into a bond of friend-

ship, which time and the university did much to cement. Allan Derisley was a year or two older than his fellow-pupils; and though he joined them in most of the pranks with which they scandalized the county, and alarmed Mr. Small, there was that about him and his pursuits which kept him without the barrier of their confidence.

This difference, however, did not hinder either of Mr. Small's pupils from perceiving the peculiarities of that gentleman any more than it caused them to abstain from amusing themselves at his expense. Small had, as we observed, taken a very high degree at the university; and the years which he had devoted to that end had left him no time to learn what was of any practical use to him in the world. Not that he was after his university career a mere Laputan; to earn his bread, he taught pupils; but having abilities of the highest mathematical order, which enabled him to construct problems that perhaps no one save

himself could solve, he took no pride in these, but was only vain of those personal and social qualifications which he was entirely deficient in. He was a great stickler for nice points of etiquette, and it was his ignorance of its laws that provided an inexhaustible fund of entertainment to the mischievous propensities of the young gentlemen placed under his tutelage. At the date of our history he was curate to the Hon. and Rev. Mr. Pilgrim.

The advent of Fabian at Carrol was a source of much pleasure to Lord Granstein, for this was the first time they had met since the return of the former from his travels; and despite the cheerless horizon which encircled the hopes of our enamoured swain, the society of his friend so soon restored him to his native elasticity, that before he had been a day in the house he found himself laughing at, and taking part in, Lord Granstein's proceedings with Mr. Small, as heartily as if the worthy curate had still been their tutor. But

to whatsoever length these two went, they were always restrained by kindliness from wounding the sensibility of their innocent butt. In fact, their pleasure consisted in his unconsciousness of the humorous figure he presented to them; and they much oftener laughed with, than they laughed at him. To Allan Derisley's behaviour this sense of delicacy opposed no check; and, notwithstanding he was as sensitive as gold leaf himself, he never considered Mr. Small's feelings, provided he could place him in a ludicrous position. The occasion of the present party seemed a favorable one for playing off some of his practical jokes; and since the upshot of a particular one, which at this time eventuated, recoiled upon himself, it may not be uninstructive, as a warning, if we relate it.

Mr. Allan's father, owing to his obesity and plethoric habit, was inhibited from taking that amount of exercise which is essential to all who, as South has it, "place their

summum bonum upon their trenchers." Had he been half as prudent as he was corpulent, he would have discovered how much temper is improved by complying, in a measure, with that necessity to labor, which Providence has so beneficently imposed upon mankind. But although not inclined to draw this inference, the inconvenience attending his sedentary indulgence became so great—that being driven by nausea from the only pleasure which was left to him—he did sometimes make an effort to regain the appetite he had lost by total inaction. For some period after he gave up going out of doors, his custom was to fillip nature by dancing himself up and down on a spring-bottomed chair; but when by degrees the fatigue caused to his arms outweighed in his opinion the benefit conferred on his abdominal regions—the chair was resigned for a rocking-horse. In order to make the motion of this wooden hobby the more efficient, small pieces of wood were nailed on the floor, cor-

duroy fashion; these gave a restive action to the otherwise inanimate steed. Now, foolish and puerile as the design was, Mr. Allan purposed, through the medium of this rocking-horse, to play off one of his pranks upon Mr. Small. He accordingly extracted the horse-hair tail from the toy, and supplied its place, as well as the apertures of the ears, nostrils, and mouth, with squibs; the saddle and mane he also adorned with crackers and combustibles of every sort.

In the evening, after dinner, Mr. Small was to be induced, in imitation of the young men, under some plea to be contrived at the moment, to mount the rocking-horse, and when he was secured in the saddle, the fireworks were at once to be ignited. The whole matter was prepared with the utmost caution. Fabian and Granstein had both remonstrated, but Allan was inflexible, and the other two at last consented to preserve secrecy and to witness the explosion of the plot. Now, by an un-

lucky accident, while it yet wanted some minutes to the sounding of the dressing-bell, Sir Foy, feeling actively inclined, betook himself to the hall for a little hobby exercise. The season of the year was already advanced, and the dinner-hour being eight o'clock, the room would have been by this time dark, even had the shutters not been closed. With a candle therefore in one hand, the baronet mounted his steed, and taking hold of the reins, which were attached to the floor instead of the horse's head, he set himself a rocking, and enjoyed for some moments the easy motion with much complacency. Presently, however, the nails which secured one end of the reins started, with the next tug they gave way so suddenly that the jerk lost the baronet's balance and threw him on the neck of the horse. In an instant the candle which he had been holding, came in conjunction with the fireworks, and since these were in every direction connected by a quick-match, the

astonished rider was enveloped in a fusilade of sulphureous combustibles ere he had time to make a single exclamation of alarm. It was impossible for him to dismount, for in addition to his inactivity, the blazing, fizzing, and popping, walled him in on every side. The louder he halloed, the fiercer the fire-works burned; and it soon became more alarming than laughable to behold his swollen and purple features, bursting in an agony of terror, illumined by the dazzling blaze of a hundred crackers. The noise had penetrated to all parts of the house; and the whole establishment—cooks, kitchenmaids, footmen, and stablemen, with the family themselves at their head, rushed in alarm to witness an exhibition of pyrotechnics that perhaps has never been equalled either at Rome or Vaux-hall. To describe the state of the unhappy victim of this catastrophe, to give his lamentations their piteous and terror-tuned whine, or finally, to set down on paper the hearty curses

which, when he recovered, he lavished on every one under his roof, would require that inspiration which highest genius only can command.

Happily—and the humane will be pleased to hear it—the little baronet sustained no real injury through the wickedly-conceived devices of his son. But the evil intentions of that young man recoiled, unknown to himself, upon his own head. Mr. Harrod, who, in virtue of his admirable shrewdness, possessed the confidence of all in whom he took an interest, speedily informed himself as to the author of the plot. Having joined his mirth with that of Allan, and applauded the motive with a respectable seasoning of caution and gentle reproof by way of showing his interest in the reproved, he lost no time in repairing to the bedside of the convalescent baronet, and there with much judicious colouring enlarged upon the reprobate nature of the young man. Nothing could have been more propitious than

was this opening for undermining the son and heir in the affections of his parent. So successfully did Mr. Harrod avail himself of it, that Sir Foy was easily won over to take the step which Harrod had so long helped him to; which was, to settle the whole of his disposable property upon the daughter destined for the bride of Harrod's son.

It might have been expected that while Sir Foy was confined to his chamber Allan's concern for his father's health would have kept him in quiet subjection. The reverse of this was the case; indeed, the whole household seemed, except from their unusual spirits, to be entirely forgetful of the baronet's absence. Even Lady Derisley was less of a sybarite than she was wont. Mr. Harrod's insidious sneers assumed an air of facetious pleasantry; and Mr. Small had less peace than ever at the hands of his relentless persecutor. But the ill treatment which the worthy curate met with at Allan's hands was not the only, nor by any

means the worst, of his misfortunes during the baronet's confinement; and if I were sure of being pardoned for relating the circumstance alluded to, I could have no more opportune moment for doing so than the present. The truth is, the story involves considerations which have nothing to do with Small; and while the adventure cannot with the utmost sympathy for the curate be otherwise than slightly comical, its collateral bearings must give rise to reflections which we trust none can ponder over but with the profoundest gravity.

Assuredly Tragedy and Comedy do walk arm-in-arm through life together, and of all Nature's delineators none are so faithful, none more instructive than Shakespeare and Hogarth, who, more continually than others, place her two most opposite phases in constant apposition.

Why then should one insignificant artist render Nature intentionally unnatural to suit

the demure ignorance of mawkish prudery? A *marriage a-la-mode* may spur the lusts of the successful rake, but sadly lost without this suggestion is he who peruses vice with pleasure, and learns from crime no lesson but to accomplish evil with most facility.

On second thoughts, then, we decide to give publicity to the curate's accident. But second thoughts also advise that it is impossible to do so in the present chapter without suffering our lover's history to fall inconveniently into arrear. With this we will now proceed, under promise to revert to Small the instant more pressing affairs shall be disposed of.

It was improbable that one in Fabian's state of mind could continue under the same roof with his most intimate friend, and not desire to lay upon that friend a portion of the burden which was growing more intolerable the longer he tried to bear it alone. Fabian

knew Raven too well to expect one so averse to meddling with other people's business would ever seek his confidence. But as he could not doubt Raven's interest both in himself and in Meriel, he resolved, at length, to make a clean breast, and hoped, in return, to get such counsel as would much profit him to pursue. No event—be it what it might—ever provoked astonishment—at least, its signs—from Raven. He listened, therefore, without surprise, to the other's recital. When Fabian had ended, he said, "So you love Meriel Sigismond?"

"I do," Fabian answered.

"Why do you love her," asked Raven.

"Why," echoed Fabian, laughing, "how can I tell?"

"Not know why you love her! No wonder Mr. Harrod thinks you unreasonable."

"Zounds! if I love her, what the deuce does it signify why I love her?"

"Only that sometimes results a little depend upon their causes."

"Yet, if I knock you down, I don't see what difference it makes to either of us whether or not I understand dynamics."

"So you see no qualities in your love, that mark her from the common herd?"

"Qualities? There never was a woman like her."

"Ah! I see. Well?"

"Well? she's perfection! what more do you want?"

"Imperfection—to make a woman of her."

"Thank ye! I can make shift without it. She's the darlingest little creature in the universe."

"'As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.' I wonder how many of Adam's sons have had that bit of wisdom by heart?"

"Well! all the roses that ever blowed, wont rob mine of its sweetness."

"If there come no other robbers in the way, 'give God thanks, and make no boast of it.' But can you not mark her qualities? Want of discrimination is a fecund want; mated with its oversights, it breeds many little ones. Some flowers, you know, catch honey-suckers in their gaudy cups. And on the blossom of the carrion-plant the silly flesh-fly lays its unprovided egg."

"A sweet simile! I do confess."

"The thing 'twas likened to might prove less sweet. But come! you don't describe her."

"Oh, she'd put out description, as the sun puts out the stars. But enough of this, give me your advice."

"Shall I paint the portrait for you?"

"Yes, yes, if you will but be in a hurry, or she'll outgrow the likeness before you put it on her."

"There is no poet's fancy in it, but somehow so it runs: Nothing studied, nothing

accidental—secret, but not mysterious—never so lost in imagination, as to lose sight of particulars—possessed of great penetration, but not prying—reserved and undemonstrative, but not prudish—warmly interested, but never officious, never supine, never fidgetty—somewhat majestic in manner, she ensures respect—playful, soft, and full of nature, she wins affection—in intimacy you are drawn ever nearer to her, but you feel there is a limit to your approach, and however severe the restraint she imposes upon another, it is still severer upon herself—with all, she is a real woman, and never more piquante than in her caprices."

"Admirable! upon my honor. This is Meriel to a shade."

"Why, so it is; and this is the love of every man of taste and sensibility. I had it from an old French humourist who lived two hundred years ago, I whipped off its national costume and have worn it as a talisman these

ten years or more. Be her name Jezebel or Mary, if she be loved, this dress will fit her. Now mark you—it is what the cameleon looks on that lends him complexion, what man looks on that borrows his. The sphere each lives in has its peculiar tinge. To angels all is brightened by the light of heaven; devils' visions are made hideous by the red-hot passions that sear their eyes. A lover gives an apothesis to the image of his brain, and upbraids heaven with want of mercy, because Miss That or T'other remains herself in spite of sacred matrimony! You want to marry her?"

"It is the only want I have on earth."

"A very sufficient one, however, as some have proved before you?"

"What! who wanted to marry *her?*"

"Ay! her, why not? or others like her. But tell me, does she love you?"

"No man loves unless he has some cause to think himself beloved; I may be deceived."

"You mean you may deceive yourself. Well, if she love you and is constant, never fear for the rest."

"She may love me, but opposition and the sense of dnty may overcome her con stancy. I don't know what to think of it —which do you think most constant, men or women?"

"Neither."

"How neither?"

"Why men have most before—women most constancy after marriage."

"Then you think Meriel may prove false?"

"Nay! I'll not be the *raven* to traduce your Coronis. I dare guess Meriel will be true to you."

"But how long? that's the question."

"Till she finds some one she likes better."

"Oh! you mock me."

"Unless I speak truth; then she will mock you."

"Confound your twitting humours! you

would torture me with the pangs of disappointment before I lose her."

"Before you win her rather. But if you apprehend the loss, you'll save yourself much pain by forgetting her at once. He who builds his hopes of happiness upon the possession of one woman risks all life is worth for a bubble that bursts at the touching."

"*Nella guerra d'amor che fuge vince.* I'm obliged for your council, but by your leave, I'd as soon be sorry all my life as take it."

"So be it then—no man's experience is another man's wisdom. I see you deserve her—or sorrow. Now what would you have me do?"

"Tell me what you would have *me* do. My father threatens to disinherit me. If by this I lose no more than his estates, my mind is resolved upon the sacrifice. But Meriel is also without fortune, and to entail upon her the

struggles of poverty, were the basest selfishness on my part."

"If you have already won her affections, as it appears you have; this generous sentiment comes a little late—you should have thought of her convenience before."

"Alas! I never supposed my father would adhere so cruelly to his own plan of disposing of me, body and heart, as he does. And indeed, I could have almost schooled myself to obedience, had not circumstances since my return to England, convinced me that I was not an object of indifference to Meriel."

"Ay, that's it, somebody is always to blame when we have done wrong. I cannot advise you."

"No! this is unkind, Raven, I thought in such a difficulty I might rely upon your friendship. But—"

"But what?"

"Oh! nothing."

"Ha! ha! ha!"

"Pray laugh if it amuses you. The misfortunes of a friend are apt subject of merriment to a man of wit and taste."

"Ha! ha! ha! This is better and better. Nay, don't go my dear boy, I never saw you offended until now. Pray do not rob me of so novel a scene—come, come, give me your hand. So now, look how preposterously unreasonable you are. You set before me an A, B, C, case, as thus:—'I have travelled such a road, and I come to a branch road; I am determined not to turn back; but which ever way I advance, obstacles lie in the path; I have made up my mind to go to the left—now if you won't give me your advice, you are a beast.' I warn you of the difficulties, and suggest a retreat, you scorn the suggestion, good. I tell you if you go this way, you brave the fears of disappointment—if the other you threaten Meriel with the worst consequences of success. To all this you

reply, 'She loves me; I will win her—or I will die. Prythee, friend, what shall I do?' If you will marry her in spite of spite, and she love you to boot, you are past advice, and independent of assistance. If you ask me to lead your conscience in the matter, I well know you will not accept my guidance."

"That depends on what it leads to?"

"Leave Meriel, and never return to see her till you have earned enough fortune to maintain you both."

"Humph! there's something in that mixture plaguily relaxing. The thoughts of ten years in India, turn my liver into leather, and half that time in the city, would convert me into a smoke-jack. Besides, I should return to find Meriel in false fronts, and changed from a blooming plum into a shrivelled walnut. I'll none of this—no, no, upon my head be the consequences. I *must*

marry her, and all I ask of you, is to give what help you can."

When Raven was alone—"He *must* marry her, and I am to give him all the help I can!" he repeated. It was evident—for he paced the room with uneven steps—that this idea was working within him like yeast. Gradually, as the fermentation heightened, the troubled spirit began to overflow. Its course was by no means transparent, but most turbid, as some may presently consider. Relevant or irrelevant however, we transcribe his mutterings without a paraphrase. Thus they began.

"Sweet and Bitter are the soul's two wings, and Experience is to us what Dædalus was to Icarus. But, like Icarus, we fall for all our wings. From design to accomplishment is the path we'd make. But the way is long, for it is all the way from suffering to peace; the way is longer than life, for strugglers remain strugglers to the end. Does not every Alexander sigh for more worlds to

conquer? And though Master of all Arts, and Cham of all the Tartaries, the unrest which leavened his youth, accelerates what little pulse is left to him. Each unwearying one learns from his last won prize, that outward evidences are in themselves unmeaning. The *thing* is not the *motive*, though it allure him to the act. Lions roar for prey—but when the prey is chymified, they roar again. And brine may as well be drunk as the sweet waters of success, to quench a thirst they do but madden. Oh! had we all we craved, we then should crave to be without that all. Still unpossessed of all—our possessions are heeded as our skins are, only when they're torn from off us, making us no happier in their completeness, for craving is still our constant bent. Some think great men are satisfied with greatness. It is not so—they take their places as little men take theirs. Eagles cannot roost on twigs—and mountain peaks are vulgar in their eyes, as house-eves

to the sparrow. One problem, the greatest, would yet give all to solve. What, and where is the Unfound?

* * * * *

"Does any count *his* sufferings, and take note of them? Let him reflect. Humanity, to its utmost limits, is circumscribed within the pale of some half dozen senses. Who'll pretend the mean condition of mankind does not involve extremes? Who that the whole range of the diameter has not been paced by millions? Millions! yes, there's something in the contemplation of so vast a host and of all their groans, reaching from the depths of hell to the highest range in heaven, that should cast that devil Self from out us.

* * * * *

"I will help Fabian to marry Meriel."

CHAPTER XIV.

It was very well for Fabian that he enlisted so active a friend as Raven on his side; for although neither of them could foresee what advantage could possibly be derived from the adherence of any person not a principal to the cause, so adverse were the Fates, from this time forth, to the advancement of the young lover's hopes, that a single friend grew to be invaluable, if only from his readiness to become the depository of the other's misfortunes. There was, however, one material way in which Raven managed to help his friend during their stay at Carrol Hall. He most effectually relieved Fabian of the necessity of shewing his indifference to Miss

Belinda. But for Raven the task would have been not only painful, but extremely difficult; for directly Sir Foy was well enough to return to the bosom of his family he made it his special concern to further Mr. Harrod's wishes by promoting at all seasons the courtship of the betrothed pair. Nor did the baronet lose an opportunity of encouraging Fabian by the assurance of his (Sir Foy's) goodwill. Once he did this in a manner not quite so gratifying to Mr. Harrod senior as was intended. Sir Foy thanked Fabian, in full audience, for the presents which the young man had promised, in his letter from Mexico, and hinted that it would give him much pleasure to see them arranged in his collection of curiosities. Upon mention of this promise, Fabian looked to his father for explanation. Mr. Harrod, was, however, so busily engaged at the moment, he obtained no help from that quarter. In fine, after hemming and hawing, he plumply confessed

he had not brought home a single memento of any kind; and indeed had forgotten that he had made any such promise in his letter.

"What!" cried his father—who was too great an adept at lying to lack half a dozen bouncers at a pinch—"you forget all you said about *serapes* to cover Sir Foy's feet in the winter time! Perhaps you'll forget next how you begged me to lose not a day in congratulating him on his freedom from gout; and a score of messages beside."

"Well," said Fabian, "I've a pretty fair memory, but I own these passages have slipped out of it without leaving a trace."

"Ah!" cried Mr. Harrod to Sir Foy, "these young fellows are always ashamed of their better feelings. As to the *serapes*, I'll be bound for it he's keeping them for wedding presents to Miss Belinda."

Raven, who was greatly edified by this instance of Mr. Harrod's ingenuity, which he

at once saw through, could not forbear quoting—

> Where the beams of warm imagination play,
> The memory's soft figures melt away.

And although he pretended to be rallying Fabian, Mr. Harrod well understood that the sarcasm was aimed at him. A retort was out of the question. The notion, however, of Fabian's keeping the presents for Belinda quite satisfied Sir Foy. He now began to say all kinds of things by way of setting on the supposed lovers. It was in cases of this description that Raven saved his friend annoyance. He would always step up to Miss Derisley, and, by allowing her to suppose that he himself was not insensible to the charms which she was ever sighing to make conquests by, he would easily soothe her piqued vanity, and so prevent the heroic airs she would otherwise have put on to obtain from Fabian the homage which she conceived to be her due. In point of fact, it was not of much

consequence to Miss Belinda of whom she made a conquest. The first gentleman that came uppermost was fittest for the place. All fitted in turn, and to each—such was her tact and the versatility of her talent—she adapted her conversation according to his particular character. With Lord Granstein her blandishments were interwoven with enthusiastic encomiums on such subjects of interest as shooting, hunting, opera-dancing, &c. To Mr. Pilgrim her tenderness vented itself in groanings over the sins of a wicked world. Her endearments to Small generally assumed a mathematical turn: and as to Raven—not being able to fathom his idiosyncracy—she practised upon him an empirical course of flirtation, which varied in its treatment according to whatsoever direction it pleased his humour to give it. Which of these aspirants had the best pretension to the largest share of her capacious heart we are not so rash as even to conjecture; nor do I think

any of them ran much risk of enthralment, except Small, who, as the fable has it, was a *vrai mouton de sacrifice*, for though up to his spectacles in love with Belinda, he was the particular one she entirely overlooked when any of the others were at hand—and not Palamon nor Arcite, nor any hero of ancient or modern romance, ever suffered more pangs from jealousy than did this reverend gentleman when his rivals were in the way. Oh, Small! excellent Small! what a position is it for man or woman to be in, when—as a friend once said to me—the reciprocity is all on one side; what antics our most solemn, most earnest feelings do put us through! Get thee to the dazzling assemblies of gay-faced fashion, and watch the manners of the man whose glistening eye and ash-coloured features speak of the passion which gnaws within his vitals. Not for an instant does he remit his intensely lynx-eyed vigilance. Every sense is concentrated in one object.

What she smiles upon he glares at; and beneath her delicately-satined feet he would cast his very soul to be trampled on—she, perchance, unconscious as Astarte's statue of the worship. But over yonder, another watches the fanatical devotee. Her very lips have lost their colour, and quiver with the unmeaning responses forced out to hide her trouble from a bevy of surrounding suitors. He—the one, the only one in all the world to her—is already trampling on her soul! Oh, Small! excellent Small! these are antics; but what philosopher can smile at them without a bleeding heart?

END OF VOL. I.

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